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Day of atonement

**DAY OF
ATONEMENT**

BOOKS BY LOUIS GOLDING

FICTION

FORWARD FROM BABYLON
SEACOAST OF BOHEMIA

VERSE

SORROWS OF WAR
SHEPHERD SINGING RAGTIME
PROPHET AND FOOL

BELLES LETTRES

SUNWARD, BEING ADVENTURES IN ITALY
SICILIAN NOON (*In preparation*)

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DAY OF ATONEMENT

by Louis Golding



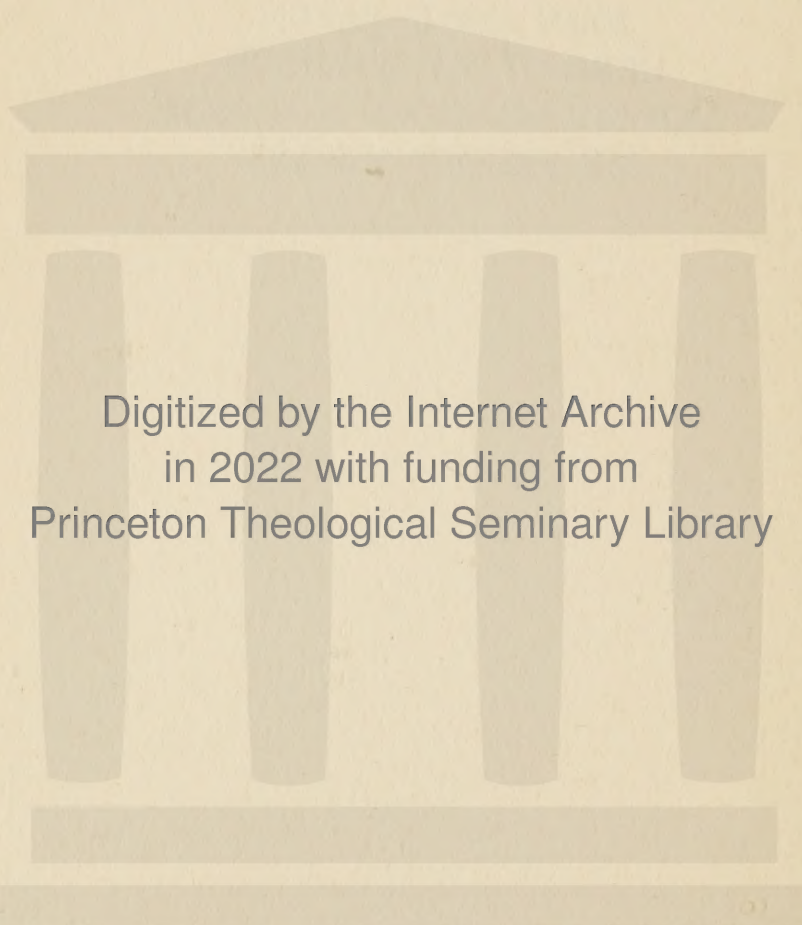
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FOR
JOHN LEWIS PATON
HERO OF MY BOYHOOD
AND MY MANHOOD NOT LESS
MY FRIEND ALWAYS



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PROLOGUE IN SICILY

PROLOGUE IN SICILY

PERHAPS I could not elsewhere in the world have envisioned so clearly as here the sorrowful ceremonial of the Day of Atonement. Below me, timeless and tideless, extended the African sea. Over me, arrested in mid-heaven he seemed, paused the Sicilian sun. The grey spikes of the agave transfixed the breathless October air that hung down over them and did not move. Uncouth, top-heavy cactus proliferated among the foundations of the Greek temples. Agave and cactus seemed a vegetation which had been old when the first anemones made purple the first spring. They would be young on the last winter, when there was sustenance for no plant else. So, too, you could not conceive that these tumbled marble drums had ever been whitely piled upon each other, supporting architrave and pediment. Here seemed the true immortality of Hellas, not in any anxious readjustment of fallen columns, or sedulous marking out of pronaos and cella.

So that time had ceased, time was eliminated from the grave perpetuity of this background. Greece being the essential condition of things, any other fancy or association might with the greater ease detach itself from the mind and play any ghostly part it chose against this sea, this grass, these Greek temples older than Greece, older than the world.

Urgently the memory of the little Jewish synagogue in

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Doomington with which I was so familiar in my boyhood knocked upon my brain, the more urgently as it was rather an accident than a zealous retention of the date in my mind which had conveyed to me the information that this day, the twelfth of October, was the Day of Atonement, the supreme day in the Jewish Calendar.

I had had no particular reason to inquire that morning for letters at the post-office in Pietrafalco. I had hardly expected to arrive here for some days yet. And least of all could I imagine that my Aunt Deborah (my only surviving relative in Doomington, for the others were all dead or had migrated to America) should suddenly bethink herself of my existence, having washed her hands of me—so she said firmly—more than ten years ago.

Wherever thou mayst be (she had written in her disjointed Yiddish script) for the sake of thy father and mother, peace be upon them, remember that in Tisri, upon the tenth day, is the Day of Atonement, upon which no Jew, however far he has wandered, does not return to the heart of his people and the dwelling-place of God. I would ask thee to give a thought to this for the sake of the dead ones so much as for thine own. Who else shall remember them? Return for some moments from the wilderness. Flee from the scapegoat, from Azazel. Be at one with us.

Thou mayst have forgotten the way of reckoning, thou, thy father's son. October then, upon the twelfth day. Thou wilt be perhaps at that time in some city with a synagogue? God grant it!

The letter had been forwarded to me from Trapani where there was a ghetto indeed, but I do not think my Aunt Deborah would have felt at home there, with oleographs of San Giuseppe and the Madonna of Trapani in

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every window, and candles before their images in every dark kitchen.

I had made my way into a synagogue, not such as she had conceived, nor out of disrespect to her and her injunctions. Nor could I associate with Azazel, the lovely fawn goats that grazed among the ruins here, with royal antlers and long hair fine as silk. From the first moment I had entered through the old peasant-woman's plantation of almonds, I had not been unaware of the goat-herd standing in the corner made by a bronze-burnished carob-tree and an extremity of the loose-stone wall. He seemed a part of this ageless furniture, as if he grew like the asphodel or the agave. Tall and strong he stood, as a cypress, and as silent. I could not see his face, nor did I desire to. The hood of his thick, blue cape was drawn down despite the rigid heat of the day, across his forehead. He did not impede the course of that dolorous pageantry that passed and passed again about the Holy Ark in the remote, tiny synagogue of Doomington. Ghosts clapping their hands together in contrition for a year's sins and making no noise, ghosts beating their breasts and weeping, but shedding no tears, ghost of Jehovah bending down to listen. His beard is a forest of dumb, racked pines. Ghosts of the old women behind their partition beating their breasts also, but what sin shall such frail flesh harbour? Ghosts of little boys simulating dreadful grief for the delectation of their elders, winking at each other hard and pulling tongues under the shelter of their praying-shawls. Ghost of the little boy that was myself adjusting about my forehead the blue-and-white silk of my own praying-shawl. Its fringes hang in the tepid air.

Sicilian goat-herd adjusting his praying-shawl also—for was not this the Day of Atonement? So do the holy men,

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the *cohenim*, stand before the sanctuary, tall and austere, in direct communion with God. He slipped the cape from his head, his first movement since I had come among the ruins. The ghosts scurried away, troubled and pitiful.

He was turned from the sun and I towards it. Goat-herd of Sicily, immemorial pagan, and Greece about my feet. He it was and none other I had incorporated into the ghetto gloom of Doomington. I laughed, throwing back my head. But my laughter had not ceased before I heard him speak. "*Shalom Aleichem*, Jew!" he said.

My first emotion was not surprise, for it could not have been adequate to this fantasy, this paradox. It was my Aunt Deborah who rose concrete, and somewhat forbidding, in the central space of my brain.

"I told you, Auntie, I told you!" I said virtuously. Something of the self-righteous little boy I had been and had evoked a moment ago clung about me. "I told you you could rely on me to go to the synagogue if I could manage it. Not that I've managed it *quite*, dear Auntie, but one Jew, and another, and another—and you have ten before you know where you are; a *minyön* that is to say!"

"Thou still rememberest that without ten Jews, adults, no service shall be held?"

"Should I forget, Auntie?" I asked her reproachfully. She moved away, her black jet beads dangling from her bonnet, and her cape swishing with sequins. She retired to the women's section of the synagogue, behind the partition there. She had recognized just as clearly as I that those Hebrew syllables, pronounced in that intonation and no other, with that precise guttural, had passed from no other than Jewish lips.

"*Shalom Aleichem*, Jew! Peace be upon you!"

"*Aleichem Shalom!* Upon you peace!"

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So it was that I met Reuben, the son of Eli, my fellow-townsmen from Doomington, among the Greek ruins by the African sea. So it was that I learned the story of Eli, his father, and his mother, Leah. For theirs is the tale I must tell, as I learned it under the canopy of vines that is the threshold to Reuben's hut, this Jewish goat-herd of Sicily, who was no Jew. Whilst his half-naked children ran like slim ghosts among the roots of his olives, or stumbled, and sprang to their feet again like does; and his woman, her dark eyes blossoming into flame, as she might be a *mænad* out of Thessaly, set before us a cruse of volcanic wine, pressed under Etna's shadow.

No, I cannot define what caprice, instinct, destiny it was that impelled him thus for one moment, one day, to build up the bridge of race he had hacked down thirty years ago. Was it something more grandiose than caprice, so grim as destiny? If it was something deeper than the first, a sudden overpowering urgency of his blood, it is hard to imagine it would not have asserted itself years ago, and more than once, before he had thus irrevocably cut himself off from all that had nurtured him and me. Yet, though I do not like to play too lightly with the thought that the consciousness of this day's significance had transmitted itself to him across the medium of this curiously sensitive air, this dead womb of air waiting to be quickened—yet, looking back upon his story, I sometimes find it not difficult to imagine his veins and nerves responsive in some subtle rebellious manner to the *sense* of the day introduced by me; for the Day of Atonement had once played so prepotent a part in his history, that it might be called either its climax or its beginning.

In what language—this was my first thought when my heart had ceased pounding against my ribs—in what lan-

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guage should conversation between this novel goat-herd and myself proceed, if it was to proceed at all? We had changed our positions in relation to the sun, and the hood of his cape lying back over his shoulder, I could now see his face clearly. I should hardly have looked at it a second time had I met the man riding on his donkey down from the gates of Pietrafalco. His face was swarthy with the sun, his hair long and coarse. I should have thought him a Sicilian of the Sicilians, though leaner than many of his countrymen. A harsh thought struck me. He was no more—that was it—than some returned potato-seller from Buenos Ayres or factory-hand from Pittsburgh. He had picked up a phrase or two of Hebrew, and several more of Yiddish, from the Jews he had knocked about with there. Sandwiching phrases like these between his nasal, hyper-vowellous English, with what futility would he not at once lacerate the morning! Having recognized me as Jew and Englishman. . . .

He spoke, and in English. But there was no more trace of America in his accent than of Siam. He brought out the words slowly, somewhat laboriously, as if feeling his way with them. Was I wrong in detecting the flattened u's and a's of the North Country? or did I only endow his speech with them later, when his tale moved from Russia into Doomington?

"I haven't seen a Jew, at least an English Jew, in these parts for many years. You are English?"

"You are right," I said, "I am a Jew from England. But you must let me say how disappointed I am. I was going to bring out my best Sicilian for your benefit. Forgive me if I can't take this as quietly as you. My head's buzzing so loudly that I can't hear myself speak. Is all this a joke?" I pointed to his blue cape, to his shoes.

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They were two simple, oblong strips of goatskin, softened by water and wear and bound with thongs about his ankles. An umbrella stood behind him, leaning upon the smoky trunk of the carob. It was such as all the peasants use here against storm or sun, its central piece made from a branch of fig, smoked at the handle, and its ribs curved twigs from a lemon-tree. "Is all this a joke?" I asked.

"A joke?" he repeated. Then he was silent for two minutes or three. He looked into my eyes with a disquieting intentness. Then he shook his head from side to side slowly several times, and turned away from me.

"I'm sorry!" I exclaimed. "You greet me in excellent Hebrew. You continue with excellent English. Are you a goat-herd from Sicily? Are you a Jewish eccentric from England? I don't want to force you to speak. But it was yourself, wasn't it, who forced words upon me and out of me? I don't know what to make of it!"

He bent down towards a coil of rope flung about a marble fragment at his feet. Its other end was tied to a ring in the leather collar of a he-goat grazing the poor herbage about us. A small bell tinkled from behind the goat's beard.

"There's some richer stuff," he said, "in that old quarry there. The sun does not get it all day and all year long. I must wish you good-day."

I could not allow this fantastic creature to slip from me so hopelessly. I could not. He had already wantonly broken the mood that the memories of this day, curiously made by this setting so much the more vivid and poignant, had created for me. He had thrust himself grotesquely out of his mute relation with that setting; he had thrown out of adjustment this phantasmal perspective of Judah persistent in her lamentations against the unlamenting

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immortality of Greece. He was mad, or I. Both of us were mad. But that was not our only kinship. We were Jews, were we not?

Then I turned round to him and cried out sharply in Yiddish: "*Zog mir a mol!* What is with thee? What sort of a black year is upon thee?"

I had the man. He squirmed as in a noose. He was bound. I saw him wince and bite his lips.

"Know'st thou not?" I continued severely. "Know'st thou not this is Yom Kippur? This is the Day of Atonement?"

He did not wince now. The huge umbrella he had just grasped slipped from his fingers. "Yom Kippur?" he breathed. I could hardly hear him. "Brother, brother, this is the Day of Atonement?" He fell back, a relaxed bundle of bones, against the trunk of the carob-tree. "Long ago, long ago!" His mind seemed to draw inward upon itself and to be absorbed down some funnel of dark memory. "I have not forgotten. No. I cannot forget." He beat his bosom twice, three times, with his clenched fist. So at that moment were those others, in the synagogue at Doomington. Then his eyes sought mine. "Must thou leave me, brother? Wilt thou come with me to my house? It is not far away. Thou seest the white wall beyond the olive-groves there. Thou seest it, dost thou not?"

"I will come gladly. But this strangeness, what is the meaning of it all?"

"Yom Kippur! I have not forgotten, Jew; I cannot forget."

I had thought him a moment ago a goat-herd from Sicily. At this moment he seemed a Jew broken and helpless from the rack of a fifteenth-century ghetto in

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Spain or a twentieth-century ghetto in Russia. His voice was flattened into a joyless monotony I remembered well. So chanted the old men in the synagogues in the late evenings, recalling their sorrows, and for the space of a single twilight forswearing the belief that had upheld them so long, that some day sorrows would be ended.

And his years seemed to have slipped from his shoulders, leaving him at once older and much younger than before. He was a boy of twelve or thirteen. There was an air of timidity about him, under the grey immanence of the chimneys and the smoke. Where should he now address himself?

I was to learn how he addressed himself to the pagan gods.

It was my duty for the moment to endeavour to restore to him, so far as my feeble powers could, that dumb self-possession which had held him motionless in his corner against the carob-tree. English, at all events, I must speak English. The goats were preceding us along a path between low vines. The bell of their leader tinkled rustily.

"You say I am the only English Jew you have seen in these parts for some time. You don't get many visitors here at all, do you?" I spoke as casually as I might, as if to walk on the southern rim of Sicily with a goat-herd from the pale of Russia, speaking Yiddish with the accent of the *yeshivehs* (which are the houses of sacred study), happened to me whenever I set foot from London.

"You must not make conversation with me," he said. "We must not be polite to each other. I want to talk to you not because you are yourself. I don't know you. Why should I know you? But because, until I have talked with you, a Jew from England, the last link is not

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cut through. I have fought hard to be free. I thought I was free. I am not. I must talk to you."

"It will be hard. I have not talked English for many years. And the other language . . . the other . . ."

"Yiddish?"

"Yes. Had I asked myself ten years ago, I would have said, 'I cannot understand a word of it or speak a word. What have that language and they who speak it to do with me?' And I have learned that it still lies as easy on my tongue as hair on the head. What shall I do then? Shall I cut out my tongue? Yes, that is what I shall indeed do, talking with you to-day.

"May I talk with you?"

I begged him not to pain me with such a question. My words pleased him, for he awoke for a moment to a feeling of my existence as apart from our extraordinary encounter.

"You know Sicily?" he asked.

But I was aware, even as I replied, his mind was not with me and would not be. What symbolic function I had assumed for him I could not yet divine, but as a personality, as a being whose flesh transgressed the sharp limits of that abstraction, I existed for him less than the poorest of these goats. His next words assured me I was not mistaken.

"I was born in England," he said.

"Yes."

"In the north, in Doomington."

With whom else could I, or could any one, have resisted claiming, in such a place, kinship in such a city? We who were both suckled at the hearts of yellow fog, we whose childhood lay both appalled under the blank eyes of the same factories—we who now were cresting a slope of

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arbutus and holm-oak under the traces of a Hellene city, about whose feet flickered the blue thistles of Sicily . . . yet I said not a word. No personal relationship was to be established between us, I understood clearly and dispassionately. So far as my own bodily fingers went I felt him as intangible as a ghost. We were two Jews side by side in Sicily. That sufficed. Should he die to-morrow, or should I, it would be to the other as if a wind had crossed his path and ceased blowing.

We had attained his house. There was nothing to distinguish it from the huts of poor peasants and goat-herds anywhere in Sicily; nothing at least to strike the eye from without. The walls were whitewashed and windowless, the vault of the roof covered with a sort of pitchy composition and raised but little from the horizontal. Several slim chestnut poles supported a vine in front of the door. A few chickens scratched under it. A patch of olives, flanked by almond-trees, ran seaward on the descending slope. At the side of the house was a small open kitchen, roofed over with a few twigs. The house itself consisted almost entirely of a single living-room; there seemed to be a small store-room for vegetables and dried manure beyond. There was little spare in the living-room for more than the bed and a couple of chairs. The table was in the open, under the vine. What was missing from the place? What did I so inevitably associate with interiors like these? What was missing? I realized with a sudden start.

No little oil lamp of cheap blue glass burning before a plaster image of Mary. No fly-blown oleograph of Christ crowned with thorns, pointing to his discovered heart, likewise thorn-crowned, luridly bleeding year's end to year's end.

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I could make out in the darkness a pale flare of marble over against the door. My eyes growing apter, I could distinguish the exquisite chiselling of a youth's hair; so much, curiously, had survived whatever sport of sea or wind or earth had extracted from the rest of the head, contour, feature, everything but poise; the unmistakable, unparalleled, unsubdued poise of the marble gods of Greece.

"Nuzza!" cried my companion, sharply. "Where art thou?"

There was no reply.

"Nuzza!" he called again. "Come, a stranger!"

I heard such a noise as a lizard makes slipping through the grass. A woman stood before us. I hardly knew if she had stepped out from the olives or from round the opposite side of the house. Her legs and feet were naked, her rich, black hair was wound carelessly behind her head in one huge loop. In the quivering of the lower lip was something of diffidence, of fear. There were such unplumbed pits in her eyes that all the devils may have housed there.

"*Caruccio?*" she asked, her voice like a bird's at evening in thick undergrowth. "What wouldst thou?"

"The children," he said. "Where are they?"

"Who should know where children are?"

Then he whipped round suddenly. "Ciccio! Out there at once!"

I became aware of a pair of eyes moving, and a head with them, and a small, slim body. A child of seven or eight came forward reluctantly from behind the swollen trunks of a clump of cactus. He scowled at me under a shock of wild hair. He was attended immediately by a lesser creature like his own shadow diminished, a girl of

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six, imitating his scowl and the sideways projection of the head, at once impudent and very much afraid.

"My children," he said, pointing to each in turn. "That will help you to understand."

What should it help me to understand? That there were bars between us more potent than bonds? The children had both disappeared again. I was aware of them during the tale that followed as shapes, as voices, as swift flame-like presences allowing no more than a glimpse of themselves, as swords that slashed their way through the knotted rope. There was a strand they had not succeeded in breaking.

"Wine, Nuzza, wine! We have business together!"

The woman set the wine down and two beakers. When, later in the day, she brought cheese and figs and bread, once more she set them down as if she addressed the service only to one man, her own. Her man was the centre upon which all her wild passion converged. He gave meaning to her hair, her bone, her blood. But as the shadows lengthened, as her mate was rapt away from her, deeper and deeper for this final day into the heart of the mourning race he had forsworn, a hatred of me grew in her, as if in her marrow she divined that I came from a territory where these blue skies were displaced by the grey pall of desolation, where they would hound her into the waste pits, scapegoat for their offences, this day of their Atonement, where she was anathema and her children pestilence.

I have done what I could to give form and coherence to the story told me by Reuben, the goat-herd of Sicily, whose father and mother were Eli and Leah from Kravno in Russia, on the upper Dnieper. We shall not meet each

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other again until world's end. But I feel this narrative to be my duty towards him, for else he will not thoroughly have achieved his exorcism, it seems to me, and the ghost of a ghost will persist between himself and that dark woman of the olive-grove sloping towards the African sea.

PRELUDE IN RUSSIA

CHAPTER ONE

I

IF anybody else than Rivkah, the easy girl of the village, had shown her the creek, the thrill of stepping slowly from the grass bank into the water, of feeling its cool circlets rising spirally like a serpent about ankles and knees and hips, would have been less exquisite, for it would have been less guilty. Just these few yards of velvet grass, and the water, and the double curtain of reeds and willows, just these and the pulsing midsummer sun. Of course if her mother had the faintest inkling that she had been keeping company of late with Rivkah—during Rivkah's off-times, which weren't many—there would be the devil to pay. She stroked her smooth limbs luxuriously. No, she hadn't had a beating for weeks. Those nasty blue weals across the arms had now quite disappeared. She regarded her young breast, her shining hair, complacently, and pillowed her head on her hands, and smiled up at the deep sky. First Rivkah, then Friday. That made it doubly sinful to go off singing to the river. On Friday of all days in the week. So much to do at home in preparation for the Sabbath day—the samovar to brighten up, the beetroots to prepare for the *borsht*, and the fish in sweet-and-sour sauce to follow. All the coarser work was left to Motka, the little gentile girl from Prijni across the river. Scrubbing floors and cleaning out hen-

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coops was good enough work for gentiles. Preparing the brasses was her own work pre-eminently. What joy it gave her to polish the trays so piously that she could see her face almost as clearly as in a mirror, like some *gubernator's* daughter. What a brave show her candlesticks made in a serried mass on the white table-cloths on Friday evenings! Like yellow irises among the reeds here in the river, earlier in the year. Most of them would be her own too, when she married—when, that is, they found a husband good enough for Leah, the daughter of Serra Golda, the grocer, and Reb Yankel. Curious how Reb Yankel was always an afterthought. It was as if he didn't exist for his own sake, so much as to give Serra Golda the opportunity of being the model Jewish wife of Kravno.

A husband good enough for Leah, the daughter of Serra Golda. She extended her limbs along the velvet grass, feeling how desirable they were, what a rich blood flowed in them, making snow and cherries. She slipped her heel along into the water. Plop! went some little beast of the river, lulled by her immobility as she lay there dreaming, into thinking her a fallen willow with a smoother and whiter skin than the others.

It had all seemed a little jaded that afternoon—poking out the samovar, sweating away at the brasses—leave it all to Motka. Even the birds to-day were too lazy to sing, everything too lazy to work, excepting the down-river breeze, and he put no energy into it either. Well, there'd be no time for a beating before the Sabbath came in that evening. That meant respite—she ticked off the intervals with her fingers—evening, night, morning, afternoon, evening. For her mother would no sooner beat

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her on the Sabbath than she would boil a kettle. Six days shalt thou labour. But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work. Leah didn't mind a little guilty rest on the sixth either. Perhaps Pappa would say a good word for her. Not that that did much good in itself, but his intercession had been known to divert the current of expostulation towards himself on several occasions. That was another interval. Besides, till to-morrow morning anybody might come riding by on a dappled-grey horse. The son of the King of France, the Emperor of America, the Pope of all Persia. She did not think of these gentlemen as Jews or Christians. They wore red tassels upon their swords. They wore feathers in their hats. If she married any of them, she would not be forced to eat barley. Leah hated barley. Rivkah was going to marry the Commercial-Traveller-in-Chief of Austria when he next came to Kravno on his rounds, to buy hay, maize, and oats.

Rivkah said this thing. Rivkah said the other thing. How drowsy the air was. How bravely the sun shone. Bumble—bumble! How lovely to lie naked among the willows. Sish! sish! Secret little noises at the edge of the water, among the reeds, tiny teeth nibbling.

A sharper noise struck her ear-drums. Not loud. Only loud in this solitude. She lifted her head, attentive, startled. Then she knew she had not been alone—tracing the curve of her lips, smoothing her body down from the armpits and up again on the under side of her arms. You cannot deceive God.

She was aware of his eyes between the bulrushes before she actually saw them, big with desire, steady with the certainty of its gratification. Then she saw their pale

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fringes, and the large desirous orbs themselves. With hardly any further movement, the rest of him detached itself.

Sergei from Prijni over the river. Not a *moujik*, not a gentleman, you saw him come slouching over the bridge with a straw between his teeth. He had spoken to her more than once in a low voice, private, for her own ear only. Even Rivkah had made no comment, and she was more schooled than most people to the perception of these advances. A beautiful creature, brutal, uncouth. They said he was the son of a great landowner in Kiev and the bed-ridden peasant woman over in Prijni, who managed to get money to keep alive, nobody knew whence. Certainly not from her son, Sergei, who spent half his time before the image in the corner, and the rest with the priests, or crying "Jew! Jew!" as some greybeard passed, carrying his praying-shawl to the tiny timber synagogue of Kravno. It had been burned down three times since five winters ago. Five winters ago Sergei and his mother first made their appearance in these parts.

He had other occupations, besides these diversions among the priests and the Jews, at night, prowling among the haystacks or down by the close fringes of the Dnieper. Rivkah could tell you something about them; but she made some effort to keep her mouth shut before Leah, the daughter of her mother, the little dark, packed rosebud, just opening. There was a quality of insistence in his large, grey eyes, something at once pitiful and terrible. Coming from his hour-long prostrations before the smoky ikon, his eyes were hungry, as if they sought a solace denied him in the close hut, where his mother turned querulous on the bed, and the flies were thick as night.

And sometimes you would see that shiftless body

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straightened like a prince and his forehead firm against heaven. Then the thought of him was like a torrent—whispered Rivkah—but he was further away than the top of a high tree, or a cloud. And of a sudden he would loosen all his powerful limbs, again, and become aware of you, with those summoning, irresistible eyes.

Twice, three times, he had spoken in a low voice to Leah. She had not caught a word. She placed her hand at her heart, which was pecking away at the flesh there, like a beak. And at home all that day she would work harder than a man, washing, ironing, polishing. She would put such devotion into the cooking that Reb Yankel would seat her upon his knee, big girl that she was, and fondle her. Till Serra Golda came in. And away sprang Leah into the shop, weighing bags of lump sugar like a machine, all evening, and straight on till midnight, till she was too tired to stand.

A flush crawled slowly like a tide the length of her white, naked body. She felt the hairs of her head tingle separately. Her finger-nails and toe-nails burned. Shame, shame, shame upon her, daughter of Israel! Could the river but rise about her suddenly and engulf her, but not in translucent water. O water, black as ink, black as sin, to hide her shame for ever! Her mother, tower of all the pride of Jewry, humbled in the dust with this disgrace. There would be no slow smile about her father's lips to burrow into his beard. He would not slap her face playfully when she came in talking, and interrupted him as he stood in prayer, facing the east.

How cold she was now in the hot, late noon. Every vein was ice. Still the lumbering body came forward almost insensibly, still making no noise save the knocking together of the reeds. Was she to fly, was she to turn

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and fly? As well might a fawn from a panther, so the more speedily to bring the pointed teeth deep into the soft flesh behind the shoulder. His eyes were the more beautiful that they were so sad as they looked down upon her.

God, how beautiful his eyes were! The lips, how firmly moulded for deeper pressing and deeper upon a young rose-petal mouth. What was this? Horror upon horror! O abominable! O treachery! A cry sprang from her lips. She was aware of a subtle warmth flooding her body, she was aware of her fingers, taut, desirous. She was aware of the golden down upon his cheek, of his lips, of his heathen limbs, arms, thighs.

Should they not take her to an open space beyond the houses and then stone her till the breath was out of her recreant body? Leave this body, lusting so impiously, black and marred, without shape, the blood thickening upon her foul breast?

But the grass, the grass—how soft it was, softer than all the swansdown gathered by her mother these long years against her marriage with some honourable Jewish youth, rich, and a scholar. The water kissing the reeds, the willows kissing the water. Young blood and young desire! A tide was carrying her away among sleepy odours, away, away! How should her weak limbs battle against a current fierce as this, gentle as this? Her eyelids closed slowly over her subdued eyes. And she heard a great crashing among the trees, a crying, a labouring of breath. She saw a black bolt hurl itself through the willows. She heard the impact of body upon body. She saw Sergei flung upon his back, then raise himself ruefully and stroke his head. He blinked. His slow lips tried to mumble some clumsy blasphemy. But the small lithe body of Eli, Eli the *yeshiveh* student, stood over

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him, expanding and contracting like her own heart. His fists clawed the air.

Shame surged back upon her in a great salt billow. Her eyes shed tears like a sudden April shower. Her breast was sick with sobs.

"Eli!" she cried, covering her face. "Eli! God be thanked! God be thanked!"

The youth was turned away from her, hiding her nakedness from himself and the other. His fists were still clenching and unclenching in his white, blazing anger.

"Dress thyself!" he gasped, like a man emerging after a plunge into water. "All is well! Fear nothing!"

Hunched up into a quivering ball, she moved a yard or two towards her clothing. "Tell me," she said, her tears falling thickly upon her shift, "how didst thou know to come? Eli, Eli, God be thanked! Hadst thou not come——." Once more her weeping overcame speech.

How could she move her limbs freely? Had not the teeth of the trap been about her ankles? What had brought him here? The questions came pounding in upon her brain. And she was not unaware, even at this tangled, burning moment, of a swift thrill of pride. For her, for *her*, Eli the remote, the pale withdrawn student immured in the synagogue twenty hours each day among the worm-eaten tomes of Mishna and Talmud, for her Eli had wrenched himself into the world where cool waters flow, and the cheeks of girls are cool. Eli about whose head hovered, said the old women, a dim flame of sanctity when at midnight he shut the door of the synagogue behind him and staggered home, his eyes almost sightless after the intensity of the day's study.

"Eli, how didst thou know to come?"

"It was Rivkah," he replied. "I was entering the

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synagogue and she pulled me by the coat. Reb Yossel was with me and would not let her speak with me. But I saw there was urgency. She told me she had seen him, this one—following. She had fear. I came. Go into the deep greenness there, and dress thyself like a Jewish daughter!”

She gathered up her clothes and fled into the hazel-thicket. The wind brought the noise of crying geese to her ears, faint and contemptuous. She dug her small, pointed teeth into her lip. Two great tears of utter humiliation stood in her eyes so that she could hardly see what garment to pick up first.

Eli must never understand, least of all Eli. She would beat her head against the wall if she knew that the heart of Eli had been darkened by her shame. Hidden from the gross world in the holy obscurity of the books, pursuing his saintly paths through the thickets of Talmud, a light to his race in the gathering darkness of these later days, how could she bear it if he guessed for the ghost of a moment? No. More than her mother, more than her father even, Eli must not understand how Lilith whispered in the garden and she had hearkened to Lilith.

II

She stood dressed in her small purple bodice and straight skirt. You could see the light pink stockings between the flaps of her low boots where her numbed fingers had not been able to button them. Her hair, which was usually tied in plaits and bound with one coloured ribbon above the brow, now hung straight behind her to the waist, still limp after her bathe. What was expected from her now? Was Eli waiting for her

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there, on the grass bank? Would it be modest to seek him again, when some minutes ago he had seen her thus? He must have seen her, however soon he had turned away. Yet was it to be presumed that he would allow her to return to the village alone, with that *burlák*, that clod-hopper, still hanging about? A flutter of pleasure stirred in her quickening blood. She swung her hair round and rubbed the rich mass between her tingling hands. Perhaps she could get some movement into it again even now, before air and sun had their way with it. She caressed it where it lay along her shoulder.

"Be beautiful," she murmured, "for the sake of a prince in Israel!"

Timidly she made her way out of the hazels towards the willows and the water again. She stopped. She heard the sound of conversation, low, easy, natural. Her first instinct was to fly at once. Some other person must have made his appearance whilst she was dressing in the thicket. Who could it be? Had Rivkah appeared? Rivkah and Eli alone in the untrodden places by the river? The thought was fantastic. Fine food for gossip in the synagogue and the shops. Perhaps there had even been a witness to her own discomfiture? She quickened her steps. It was not Yiddish they were talking. There was no mistaking its intonations. That was the voice of Eli. He was talking Russian. With whom? Question. Reply. Some words of exposition, remonstrance. Question. Silence. A bee humming. Whose voice was that? She moved some yards forward. Whose voice was that—thick and awkward? Her pulses throbbed. That could not be Sergei? She glided forward between the tree-trunks.

It seemed that her eyes must start forward out of her

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head, or be smitten with darkness. Had it been Rivkah with Eli, she could have understood. A Jewish daughter, a lamb from the flock however smirched. But could it be? This hater of their race, this scoffer at old men, this flinger of mud at the palms and citrons when they perambulated between house and synagogue at the time of festival! Was Eli mad? Had he not ten minutes ago hurled himself between this foul creature and his lust, this monster swooping upon the undefiled body of a daughter of Israel!

Eli was seated against a tree, his head bent forward like a bird's. He was looking through contracted eyelids upon the face of Sergei, as upon some new commentary, elucidating an obscure passage that had long eluded him. His mouth was pursed together, the first finger of the left hand lay along the first finger of the right, in a manner at once inquisitive and expository. It was a mannerism familiar enough at the *yeshiveh*, the house of study. His whole manner was one of profound interest and curiosity. The anger that had so convulsed him when Leah had last set eyes upon him might have flared up and expired a season ago, or might never have blazed at all. The hulk of Sergei's body was supported upon one colossal hand, the fingers splayed out upon the grass. The rest of him extended loose and shambling towards the water's edge. His light grey eyes were furtive and watchful. They were not easy. There was no doubt that now, in cold blood, if these two youths set upon each other, in a few moments Eli would lie at Sergei's heel, bleeding. But if it was the sudden impact of his rage that had sent the Russian sprawling, there was as little doubt that the cool strength and fervour of Eli's intelligence kept in subjection the blond, dangerous mass of the other. As

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Leah looked down between the dropped willow branches upon the two young men, a palsy seized her. Never in her life before had she known such horror, such indignation.

"I ask again," said Eli, "why do you so hate us, why are we Jews like bones in your throat, that you will defile our women and split our babes upon spikes. Tell me, Sergei, why is this? I cannot understand." There was no sub-tone of resentment in the inquiry. Precisely with these inflections might Eli pursue some complex grammatical puzzle in the company of the scholars of Kravno. "Why is this, Sergei? For are we not as other men?"

Sergei fumbled about with his loose hand. The fingers found their way into a pocket and brought out a raw onion, that still carried its brown shell and its roots. He lifted it to his mouth and bit. Then he chewed ruminatively.

"Yes?" Eli insisted.

"The priest says——"

"Yes, the priest over in Prijni?"

"The priest says that Jews are necessary. God sends them. They are like lice. If Christians had no lice they would go down to the grave without washing once." He spat out the onion roots in a powerful projection towards the water. Then he wiped his mouth with his sleeve. "Why should Christians wash if not for lice?" Silence followed. To Eli it seemed that the heavy wits creaked almost audibly like some wain lurching at night with a stack of maize along the country roads, some crude, raw harvest for the clacking fowls or the pigs. He realized there was no quickening the pace of that waggon. The horses lumbered along.

"And the priest says, 'God sends Jews. They are

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necessary, like lice.'” The cart was doubling on its tracks. “But when the priest is drunk he says, ‘Christians need not wash every month. There are other ways of slaying lice, not only drowning them.’ Then we arise and slay the lice!”

“But Sergei, the priest is often not drunk. I am certain he is a good and holy man. What does he say when he is sober?”

“He says nothing.”

“You are lying, Sergei. You are always ready to lift a curse or a clot of mud. Why is it? What is the fuel that stokes the fire?”

Sergei looked up craftily. He tapped the side of his nose with his finger.

“Ah, Jews,” he said, “*You* know.”

Eli bent forward persuasively. “Tell me!”

Leah placed her fingers in her mouth and bit them hard to prevent herself screaming.

“You have done it yourself often,” said Sergei. “You are a young Jew-priest, no?”

“No. I am nothing. I only study day and night the holy books of our race. What is it you are hiding?”

A look of fright lay upon Sergei’s face for two moments, then slowly faded from it like a man receding into a mist.

“At Easter,” he said.

“The Passover we call it. Yes?”

“The little Christian child for the blood-offering, eh?” He leered knowingly. All the colour ebbed from Eli’s cheeks, already pale enough.

“Now! Now!” shrieked a voice in Leah’s brain. “Now at last he will rise and leave the impurity! Now he has trafficked long enough with the evil thing! Brother, brother, flee!”

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But the colour came back into Eli's cheeks. A smile fell upon the corners of his mouth. He settled himself more comfortably against the tree. You might have thought him in the synagogue surrounded by the admiring greybeards. In the watches of the night he had struggled with some cunning problem of interpretation and exegesis. He saw it all clearer than daylight now. He would explain.

He slapped the hollow of his palm. "Sergei," he said evenly. "It is like this. Whereas in the time of our bondage in Egypt, it was enjoined upon us——"

But she could listen no more. Sick, incredibly mortified, her ear-drums beating a hideous tattoo, she sped back into the wood and thence towards the open meadow. Only Sergei heard the crackling of twigs underfoot as she flung herself away. In a level, passionless voice Eli proceeded to expose the fallacy. Sergei munched his onions complacently while reference and cross-reference to talmudist upon talmudist wove a sleepy pattern upon the air like gossamer suspended from the branches.

Sick, incredibly mortified! She had not been so humiliated even when her mother at her tenth birthday had stripped her and beaten her before her friends! She hated him. Pale and smooth, in love with his own learning, and with no other thing or thought in the world! Angel of the old women, the old men's darling! She hated him.

With arrogant insistence the thought of that other youth came back to her. She shrank from it, was enkindled by it. How firm and mighty the body of Sergei extended under the willows towards the water! What lips were those, casual and terrible!

"God pity me!" she moaned. "A daughter of Israel!"

CHAPTER TWO

I

“**D**ADDANU,” said Leah, “little father, I can bear it less than beatings. Why does she not beat me?”

“Two roubles forty kopecks, one rouble twenty, no roubles sixty-five kopecks,” chanted Reb Yankel aloud. It could do no harm to give his wife the impression that nothing in the world occupied his thoughts excepting the shop accounts. Nevertheless she was probably safe for half an hour yet, for he had left Rochel, the bed-maker’s wife, behind him, buying eggs. Rochel would hold each egg up to the light as fastidiously as the paper money that relatives sometimes sent in from America. She would hold them up straight, then reverse them, for all the world as if they were the holy citrons that people carried about with them on the Feast of Tabernacles. Then she would hold them to her ear, while a particularly knowing expression came into her eyes. It was from her nose that she withheld them. That would be altogether too unsubtle a test for so eminent a connoisseur. And all the while Serra Golda would maintain a stream of amiable conversation, for that was her line. She had realized twenty years ago that if you converted the purchase of pickled cucumber and salted herrings out of a mere business of drab domestic routine into a pleasant social function, success lay before you. And it came.

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Cheikah, the widow, had long ago sold her stock to Serra Golda, her bustling young rival, and made off for Odessa and the Holy Land. Whenever Cheikah had been induced to accompany her sales with conversation at all, it was merely to pay a lugubrious tribute to the piety of her deceased husband. In Jerusalem, at the Weeping Wall, that fragment of the Temple where so many centuries of Jewish pilgrims had shed such copious oceans of tears, she would be able to attest her husband's merits without interrupting the attestation to sell a pound of pearl barley. More recently, Izzel Chaim, a young widower from Sveksna, an up-river village, had set up another grocery shop at the further end of the village. He had been a money-lender and did not lack capital. The only thing he lacked was Serra Golda's conversational gift. It would make his gall boil—so people phrased it—to see folk who were his own customers by every sort of prescriptive geographical right, go hurrying by towards Serra Golda's black olives and improving conversation. As for the accounts—Serra Golda's husband, Reb Yankel, could be trusted with the accounts. Human contacts, that was *her* department, flesh and blood, buyers and sellers.

Leah, big girl that she was, snuggled up more comfortably on her father's knee. Then she placed his arms round her neck and rubbed her dark brown hair into his dark brown beard. Gently he disengaged her hands, swung them away from him and behind her on to the table. One after one, he lifted the delicate little fingers and let them fall again.

"Léanu!" he whispered. He kissed her gently on the forehead. "Little daughter!" She closed her eyes and made little pleased noises in her throat.

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Why must she ever move? Could she ever elsewhere be so happy? To stay here from now till the New Year, on and on, forgetting and forgotten. It would always be twilight, so that nobody would come in and interrupt, saying: "It is Yom Kippur, now, the Day of Atonement. Rise, prepare yourselves for the synagogue!" And the harsh day would pass over their heads like a cloud, and the festival of Tabernacles would come, but she would do nothing more than sleepily tangle and disentangle her father's beard, and he would do nothing more than stroke her fingers, from the nail to the knuckle, from the knuckle along the blue veins. And the shrill festivities of Simchath Torah would follow with dancing and dancing and dancing about the Ark of the Law. But they would not move, Leah the child that should never be a woman, and Rab Yankel, the father, who was lovelier than all lovers in the world.

There was the clang of a bell as the shop door opened and closed.

"Ops a little daughter!" said Reb Yankel, shifting his daughter from his knee. "Two roubles twenty and one rouble forty-five makes three roubles sixty-five kopecks, no?" But the bell clanged again to the opening and the closing of the door. Another customer.

Leah was standing at the left corner of the mantel-shelf where it extended towards the wonderful new clay stove, imported from Austria. She had made a perfunctory movement towards the brass mortar and pestle that stood on the shelf there. You might as well flick away a non-existent speck of dust from the mortar and pestle as pretend to do anything else. She shook her head rebelliously.

"I would rather, *daddanu*, that she had beaten me ten

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times and ten times again, than that she should treat me like a log of wood for the stove. Even to Motka she will say, 'Do this, *shiksah!* Do that, *shiksah!*' Am I less than a moujik's daughter?"

"A daughter, a daughter," said Reb Yankel, "that goes out, the Above One knows where, into the fields on the eve of the Sabbath—Brrrrrr!" he growled, with factitious fierceness. "Such a year upon all our enemies!"

She stamped her foot. "Let her beat me then! And did I not say"—you could gather from the innocence of her tone that she had said it at least five times—"did I not say I was with Eli?" She had forborne from mentioning any name at all.

"With Eli?" repeated her father. "A credit upon his race! May his kind multiply! Hadst thou but said Eli!"

She turned away from him and stooped towards the stove, flushing abominably. She felt sick at her deception, and she knew it to be twenty times as wicked because it was a twentieth part of the truth. And still worse than that, ever so much worse than that, it was her father, bearded like God and many times more agreeable, she had lied to.

"Thou art blushing, daughter?"

"It is the fire!" she said. In her confusion she had forgotten the stove was not lit to-day. Had not her mother made it clear ten minutes ago that the samovar was to be prepared? Was there not a guest coming in to take tea with lemon this evening and *lekach*, sweet cake with grain?

"Ops, ops, ops! A maiden! Ops, ops, a grown-up maiden!" said Reb Yankel playfully. It was desolating. He could interpret no thought or gesture of hers save

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into something candid and luminous as his own spirit. "And a grown-up maiden," he chaffed her, "sits upon her father's knee and will have him tell her tales! Hast thou ever seen such a Léanu?"

That was just the trouble—a grown-up maiden. Yet how different it sounded when *he* put it so. When Leah had returned that Friday evening from her escapade by the river, her mother had not filled the air with promise of retribution on the evening after the Sabbath. It startled Leah that her mother took it with so rigid a silence. Whenever Serra Golda walked through the house for the next few days she was a focus of icy disapproval. No direct word passed between the mother and daughter. Leah was allowed to fulfil her household duties entirely upon her own initiative, and—what was more devastating—though it was made quite evident that at least as much labour as usual was expected from her in the shop, no orders were issued. She had to determine for herself whether the bags of weighed sugar were running short and which was the best quality of baking-flour. She was terrorized into a mechanical precision of choice and perfection of conduct. Hourly she felt the sweet solaces of girlhood fall from her. Long ago she had determined that when once the insidious lines grooved the smooth skin between the nostrils and the corners of her mouth, she would exile herself for ever from her kind, ashamed of so palpable a token of senility. Feeling herself as the chill day advanced more and more a desiccated woman, she was certain the grooves she had feared were already channelling her face. She was certain that her forehead was sagging and wrinkled. She had no doubt that a strange young man riding upon his white horse into

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Kravno, so far from realizing her to be sixteen, would imagine her at least twenty-two.

Nor had her mother so completely ignored her but that the words "woman, grown-up woman" were not once and again repeated in her hearing. The inference was that you do not punish with blows a woman, a grown-up woman, for the dereliction of her duties, and her inadequacy to the unimpeachable example set by her mother. The time had come when she herself might be expected to set an example to her younger sisters in Jewry.

The time had come for more even than this.

There was a noise of footsteps in the small passage between the shop and the living-room. The bell must have missed fire this time. It did occasionally. That bell ought to be seen to, if ever there was any finding Boruch sober—Boruch, the locksmith, the handcart-painter, the measurer for coffins. *Schnaps* half the day and all the night! Soaked and soused in *schnaps* like a cucumber. When Long Faivel died, the coffin that had been sent in could not have accommodated a five-year-old with comfort. A joke was it? *Schnaps* was it? A scandal in Jewry! That bell would have to be seen to.

"That makes three roubles twenty-two kopecks. Add sixty kopecks for dried peas——"

The broad-shouldered, broad-breasted figure of Serra Golda was in the room. It was not merely in the doorway. It filled all the four corners. There was no space of ceiling or floor it did not occupy. Her great earrings of twisted gold and brilliants cascaded towards her neck. At the very moment of her entrance you might have re-

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marked that all her features were disposed into a smile, a competent, sympathetic, winning smile. You had no difficulty in understanding her success or why the women of Kravno, five or six days after childbirth, were already restive, fussing to go over to Serra Golda's to buy candles they did not yet want in order to take part in the social amenities they did. A moment later, after she had crossed the threshold, though her features still retained the same relation with each other, you would have seen the smile annulled, expunged, like a vapour disappearing from a mirror. What connection was there between business with its smiles diplomatic, smiles conciliatory, smiles obligatory, and the stern business of running a household in Jewry?

"Leah, thou wilt dress thyself at once in thy best *yomtov* dress, thy dress for the festivals. Go!" They were the first words directly addressed to her by her mother for five days. "A friend will be here, a matter of minutes now. The teapot, thou hast made warm the teapot with water from the samovar?"

Leah knew that if she did not hold her lips tight, she would start whimpering. If her mother tolerated the least inflection of tenderness in her voice something would impel her—as it was impelling her at this moment—to launch herself against the ramparts of the enemy. Her head ensconced in her mother's capacious bosom, she would howl like any baby with an ache in the stomach.

"*Mammanu, mammanu*, I don't want to be a grown-up woman! I am afraid. Kiss me. You used to. Let me have my arms about your neck and then about dad-da's and about yours once more. Out in the cold night of being grown-up, there are wolves padding that

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wait for you. He also is waiting, that one, the terrible. I am so frightened, *mammanu!*"

Serra Golda turned towards her husband. "Reb Nochum, the *shadchan*, the marriage-maker, is coming over from Terkass to-day to regard thy daughter."

Leah knew that intonation well. So had her mother spoken of the agent from the big stores in Kiev who was expected on one day or another with a new line in sweet biscuits.

She stared like a threatened animal towards her father. Had he too betrayed her? Did he too desire to thrust her forth into the darkness, into strange arms? She saw that his surprise was no less than her own. He shook his head two or three times. As she withdrew into her own room she heard him murmuring: "Wife, couldst thou say no word to me? I too am a parent, no?" Serra Golda made no reply. Her silences were never less eloquent than her speech.

Curiously leaden, unresponsive, Leah's limbs were as she slipped the festival finery over them. How she had gloated over this ring, this comb, the buckles on these shoes. With what envy Tsipele had glared, and how Henkah had fawned upon her to see her come forth in such magnificence. She was too listless to slip the ring upon her hand. It fell under the bed and she left it there. This was what it meant to be a grown-up woman? She was too dispirited even to weep.

They were already sipping their tea and breaking up the *lekah* cake when she re-entered the living-room. Unheard of attention—even for her too a cup of tea was poured out and a wedge of cake broken. She drew a chair up to the table. "No!" her mother pointed. "Sit on the

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edge of the sofa, Léanu!" (*Léanu!* Leah winced. She could address her by her pet name now. And for five days she had not allowed her a single drop out of her torrent of inexhaustible eloquence.) "Place thy tea on the small table, daughter mine!"

It did not take her long to realize the meaning of this manœuvre. The large table would have concealed her, now her points were manifest as any horse's in a cattle-show. Her tiny feet, her ankles, her hips, her breast—all satisfactory, we think, Reb Nochum?

Reb Nochum made a gallant effort to put her at her ease. "And how goes a Jewish daughter? A pleasure it is, should I so live, to see a pair of eyes, jewels are not brighter. She blushes too? She knows how to blush when it suits her! No evil eye befall her, Reb Yankel, a daughter in a hundred, should I so live!"

He slapped his thighs. He roared with laughter. Then amiably he seized the black mass of his beard between his thumb and fingers and tugged away at it. So thick a growth were his eyebrows that the eyes themselves seemed small and remote and unimportant. But Leah knew that not before Sergei's eyes by the river had she lain stripped more naked. She felt her thick bodice to be filmier than gauze under their smart inquisition. Steadily, scientifically, those large expert hands seemed to ponder the solidity of her flesh, as they slid about her waist, estimated her thighs.

She could not wholly withdraw into her own mortification. She knew what it meant when her father blinked as he was doing now, as if he had a malady of the eyes. She knew how speechlessly wretched he was. His spoon tapped nervously without ceasing against his tumbler of tea. Serra Golda was not distressed. She

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had the nerves of an ox. With such a husband, with such a daughter, God in heaven, did you not need them?

A large cube of sugar was wedged between Reb Nochum's brown teeth. The bright red lips, all the brighter for the dusky boskage that surrounded them, lay folded in flaps about the sugar. Cunningly he sieved the tea through it. Only a quarter or a third dripped down upon his waistcoat.

"Such a daughter," he said, the sugar now being disintegrated,—“one in a hundred, should the Above One so be kind to my children and me!”

Serra Golda was at her best. A little sententious (for an apophthegm or two was always appreciated by her customers), altogether alert and breezy, Reb Nochum endorsed amply the fame of her charming manner and prepossessing appearance. He was not above a mild flirtation himself in the way of business, though it was strictly to be understood that no rebate on commission was made on that account.

"Such a good housewife," the mother was saying, "should no evil eye befall her. When you come again, Reb Nochum, she shall make *varennikas* in your special honour. Such paste, you would think an angel, not a creature, had kneaded it. And raisins in the stuffing. Would you believe it, her own idea from her own head it was!"

"Enough, let here be no racking of wits. With marriage it comes, everything. How to cook, how to wash, how to make a husband a new pair of fringes, a baby to have, male or female——"

There was a noise of feeble expostulation from Reb Yankel. "Time yet, time yet——"

"Never too much time," said Reb Nochum with a touch

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of severity. "As it says in the passage: 'I will multiply thy seed exceedingly that it shall not be numbered for multitude.' Be content, these gifts come. They grow. It is the tree's nature, like pears upon the pear-tree." It was not to be imagined that the premarital possession of culinary and kindred qualifications should unduly influence the market.

"But before the marriage," inquired Reb Yankel, "two or three times they will meet?"

Serra Golda turned round indulgently towards her husband. "And before our marriage we met once even?"

"Those were other days. Now the young generation is not growing up with the same ideas——"

"Ideas, ideas, tsa—tsa! So much for ideas!" broke in Reb Nochum. It was usually the mothers who were troublesome. "Flesh and blood, marrow and bones, when *these* things change——" The suggestion was that when these things changed, Reb Nochum would think it was about time to abandon his profession. "But brotherhood is not business." He felt safe in assuming with this admirable woman that they had already arrived at the stage of brotherhood and sisterhood. "As I told you, Avrom is the son of Zcharyah, the first miller in Terkass, who is also a scholar of the Talmud as well as a rich man." Something for an odd moment put a recollection of Leah into his mind. He turned towards her with a large easy smile. "Avrom, a name, it pleases you?" He did not wait for her reply. Her existence slipped out of his mind again. "Avrom's father demands first, that after the marriage, the youth shall live in your household for two years as a guest and for three, if both you and Reb Zcharyah agree on a third year. Then there shall be five hundred roubles down on marriage, on the

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understanding that he himself, when Avrom is nineteen——”

Reb Yankel's hands were trembling with agitation. He got up from his chair, pushed it from him, pulled it in again, sat down. “My daughter,” he said, “I insist she goes out. Is she a sack of lentils? Léanu, go and tell Henkah that—go away, little daughter. Go away. Thou art not wanted.”

Serra Golda shrugged her shoulders. “What harm might it do a daughter? Yet let her go, why not, if her father desires it! . . .” Admirable wifely complacency!

Leah lifted her eyes towards her father. They were piteous with gratitude.

“I go to Henkah,” she said. “At once!”

II

Leah hesitated for a moment outside Henkah's house. She did not like Henkah, if only because Henkah was deemed by Serra Golda to be an ideal friend for her. It was just because Reb Yankel knew that Henkah's name was a pleasant odour in his wife's nostrils, that he had suggested it. If any suggestion was likely to produce neither present opposition nor later reproof, it was the suggestion of Henkah. Henkah was a perpetual testimony to the merit and piety of Serra Golda—a large, loose-limbed girl with pale lashes and red hands. In the absence of her prime enthusiasm she foisted upon Leah, as upon her mother's most natural deputy, her fulsome oblations. Too acutely Leah was conscious of the distance by which she did not approach the glories imputed her.

She knew precisely what she wished to do at that

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moment. At the other end of the village, among the tumble-down hovels of the poorest tailors and shoemakers, stood Rivkah's wooden cottage, with its cap of thatch slipping down drunkenly upon one side. If the oil lamp was hardly burning or not burning at all you were better out of the way. If the wick was high, you lifted a handful of gravel and flung it at the window. There would be a swift movement of shadows within, lengthening and contracting upon the further wall. Then the lamp was extinguished and in a minute you heard her hand at the latch. Then Rivkah was at your side, and both of you creeping away into the shadows, out towards the fir-woods on the low hills to the north or down towards the willowy lands by the river. Excepting her father only—and there are things you do not discuss with fathers—no one in the world understood her like Rivkah, and no one had such seductive tales to tell of bright days and brighter nights in Kiev and Odessa.

And it was all so thrilling, getting there, wandering about with Rivkah, getting back home again—Serra Golda's daughter.

She had already lied to her father once that day, lied by inference at least. She drew her long loose shawl about her finery and rapped at the door with her knuckles.

"Who is it?" came a voice from the further side.

"It's me, Leah!"

There was a glad noise like hens clucking. And a shriller, sweeter noise—Dina, Henkah's little sister, a little black-eyed creature of four or five whom Leah loved devotedly. At least Dina was not in bed yet.

Henkah hurled herself upon her cheeks, left, right, left, right, then plumb upon her lips.

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"Léanu, what for a gladness it is! Come in. Not for days hast thou shown us a foot!"

Forth sprawled Dina, crowing. "In, in, a maiden!" cried Leah. She seized the child in her arms and hurried across the threshold with her. Her shawl slipped as the child clutched at it.

"What for this wonderful dress, and not the Sabbath even?" inquired Henkah quickly.

"Perhaps I put it on even for week-days now? Why not?"

"Yes, why not? A mother worth half Kravno, herself a lump of gold!" admired Henkah. "Let me take the child from you. She will tear open the lovely workings at the neck, Léanu my heart."

Henkah's adulation without the cool solace of Dina's limbs, the sticky perfection of her tiny fists, would be intolerable. "Let a maiden be!" objected Leah. "What's wrong with a maiden?"

"And yet, tell me, why the festival dress?" wheedled Henkah. "A young man," she flashed suddenly. "Say it not, I know! Or the marriage-maker is expected to-night?" Her voice hardened under the strain of a double jealousy. She was two years older than Leah and the marriage-maker had managed to clinch no contract for *her*. And who was this proposing to carry away her darling, her Léanu? She laughed herself to scorn. "Of course it is not true. In a house like Serra Golda's is it not always a day of festival?" She continued the theme, interminably, nauseatingly—the material and spiritual felicity of Serra Golda's household. Slowly Dina's eyelids fluttered to rest and the long lashes threw their shadow on the pale ivory of the child's cheeks. Quietly against Leah's distracted heart the child's heart beat. She

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enclosed the tiny feet in her hands. They made them seem in contrast almost as gross as Henkah's.

"Hush, the child sleeps!" whispered Leah.

But neither the speed nor the rumour of the flood abated. She had at least fulfilled her word. She had been to Henkah. Enough of her. She would scream, even with Dina in her arms, if she submitted to these oleaginous panegyrics for long. Such a mother, such a household, such wealth, such piety, such a clay oven that not even Vienna knew its like, such trimmings upon the dress, such banquets as they cooked for the Sabbath. . . . At the very acme of her detestation, the pathos of the raw, ugly girl struck her like a slap on the cheek. She saw Henkah for the first time, looked at her startled. A moment later she found herself sobbing and the large red face of Henkah nuzzling into her own, inquiringly, triumphantly.

"Let me go!" she shrieked. Dina opened her eyes and whimpered.

"I understand not!" cried Henkah. "What have I done?"

Leah disregarded her. "Forgive me, Dinele," she was whispering, "I know not what is with me these days!" She carried the child over to the bed at the further end of the room and kissed her hands and feet. A moment later she had shut the door of the cottage behind her. A fresh breeze was blowing and she drew her shawl tighter about her ears.

Of course it was Rivkah's turn now. Leah smiled. What would Reb Nochum say at this moment to see her sloping away to the abandoned one, the woman from beyond the nefarious portal? How much would it depreciate the current quotation? She stepped out

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briskly. As the blood coursed through her body and her cheeks tingled, she let her shawl slip down upon her shoulders. They would recognize her, would they, as she made her way into these dubious parts? Let them! She entered the back street behind Yussuf the butcher's. The houses closed in upon her. As they became more decrepit, they fell away from her again, for some of them had rotted down almost to their foundations. She was outside Rivkah's house now. No lamp was burning. Rivkah was out or had company. More probably she had company. Leah bit her lip with vexation. Or perhaps—it had been a hot day—perhaps she was out taking the air in the pine and larch wood? The pines never shrugged their shoulders as she passed by. The larches never swept their skirts aside. More than once she and Rivkah had walked together into the clearings and taken their shoes off among the spilth of pine-needles, and sung songs, and sat down upon a felled tree and told tales—she and Rivkah together. Rivkah, that is to say, sang songs and told tales. Rivkah asked nothing more than to touch her hand sometimes or caress her forehead.

Leah was out in the meadows now, almost under the shadows of the outpost pines.

But that was neither shadow nor tree twenty yards away from her. No shadow had flesh so potent, no tree had arms to crack your ribs and lips to crush yours or draw them into their own substance.

Sergei! She must fly from him! Was there time? The lumbering *moujik*, the foul liar! Had he not said that the Chosen Ones sought out a Christian child upon the Passover and drank his blood? Her own father, gentlest, sweetest of humans, Oh, and so incredibly far

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away, did her father drink gentile blood? Body of a lying dog! She would dig her nails deep, deep into his flesh, till the blood gushed upon this black grass. She was afraid that she would be convulsed with laughter at the fatuity of her attempt at self-deception, before he arrived, before his desired lips were upon hers, desired these days and nights so intolerably.

But Sergei was not too late. Gently as any moth's wing that had brushed the pale luminousness of her face that evening, the peasant's coarse lips brushed hers and passed them by. Then, like a heavy clot of night, he lurched away from her, away into the raven darkness of the wood. Her head swam, not as if she had stolen and drunk great draughts of wine, but strangely, insidiously, as if she had placed upon her tongue a minute drop of poison that corrupted not her body, but her soul, deep down to its hidden Jewish springs.

"Traitor!" she said to herself complacently, "prostitute!" She leapt to the unuttered sound of the word and flung her hair defiantly. Then she turned her face towards the village. "The marriage-maker will have left the house of Serra Golda?" she ruminated. "It may be yes, it may be no. So be it."

CHAPTER THREE

I

IT was evident that Serra Golda meant business. In the first place she added Hinda, a little Jewish girl from the village, to the establishment. Nothing short of the disappearance of Leah, whether meditated in a month or two or in a year, would have induced Serra Golda to share her regal responsibilities, however slightly, with a stranger. To Hinda, now fell the weighing out of sugar and the cutting-up into rhomboids, of *ingber*, the peppery sweet compounded from cooked ginger and sugar and flavoured by subtle essences which were Serra Golda's own proud secret. Native though the stuff was to the colder ghettos against the German frontier, its very name being the corruption of a German word, Serra Golda had impregnated it with the ardour of the Ukraine. *Ingber* made the shop almost as popular with the youngest generation as the social pleasures to be shared there made it among the middle-aged. For that reason it was associated in Leah's mind with frequent indulgences on the part of little Dina, scandalously aided and abetted by herself; hence she remembered it with a tolerance she did not extend towards stock-fish (*chomaikehs* they called it) or dried peas or liver-sausages—those mature substances, in a word, out of which her mother had compounded her monumental and successful personality.

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But it was in the direction of needle and thread, of dough to be pinched and twisted into *knishehs* and *varennikas*, of sweet and sour sauces for fish, that Serra Golda in these days turned her daughter's attention. No word passed her lips concerning the gentleman from Terkass with whose destiny the destiny of Leah was to be interwoven so intimately. But she treated her daughter as woman to woman. The process embarrassed Leah strangely, for there had been no gradations between these conditions of a somewhat protracted infancy and a somewhat precipitate womanhood. She concluded that her father also had been forbidden speech on the subject. What did it matter? Spending most of her time between the kitchen and the living-room, strengthening herself in those talents she was to lay at the altar of a marriage she no more contemplated than the addition of a nose-ring to her charms, she saw more of her father these days than she had seen for years. He would sit all day in his corner, thumbing the accounts and sipping his glass of tea with lemon; and when the accounts were over, he would take down some large, dog-eared folio from the shelf behind his head, and lose himself pitiably in a maze of Targum. Not that it took him long to lose himself. He was a scholar of no great depth, and the mere weight of the volumes impressed him almost as much as their sanctity. He had inherited them from his father without his father's capacity for absorbing them and rendering them again in the form of sermons even more subtle and unintelligible than themselves. He loved to finger them, to turn their crumbling pages, then, when evening came, to light two candles at their head, as if they were a particularly reverend corpse. Indeed you might sometimes see, or Leah might, a large tear rise in each

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eye and fall luminously upon the page below him, a tear of mellow felicity. He was recalling at these moments neither his sainted father nor the occasional asperities of his wife. He was aware merely that the tea tasted good, and the volume of Talmud felt good, and his daughter, better than these, sat by the table knitting in the failing light. She would come over and make a great to-do with a cloth, wiping his face, as if he were a child, as indeed he was, but less vocal than most. And she would kiss him between the eyes and then return to the table demurely.

Very demurely. She had ceased to trouble herself over her perfidy. Or perhaps she felt that they were two separate human beings who thus bandied sweet pleasantries with her father in the darkening room and, upon other evenings, when the lust had come upon her, muttered some words about visiting Henkah or some other girl friend in the village, and made for the arms and the lips which held her captive and cowering as any mouse in a trap and exultant as a wild filly by the river-banks. When they parted, they made no arrangement for meeting again. She trusted, and she was not betrayed by it, an instinct which should guide her to him whenever she felt the need of him imperious. He had not yet demanded the last surrender from her. Perhaps it was from this hidden and portentous nobleman whom the tattlers on both sides of the river alleged to have fathered him, that he had acquired, the harsh youth with heavy feet and shoulders like a bullock, this faculty for playing with a fire which hitherto had leapt up in him in a devastating moment and was quenched as soon. Like any gallant from a French court of the eighteenth century, he knew how to let the flame dwindle until a look of

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abject terror came into the girl's eyes. Then he would breathe on it, blow on it, till both their faces were transfigured in its glare. That she was a Jewish girl, than whom none, he had gathered, had brighter prospects in Kravno or a fairer name, added an even richer flavour to the flavours of her small mouth and silk cheeks and her hair's dusky abundance. He must have seen her fondling the child, Dina, in the streets. He would let it be seen that not even a frail child's breath must interpose between his lips and hers. There was no room for Dina, for her mother, her God, in their mouths' annihilating union. But the memory of the child provoked him to another and more impersonal rancour. He remembered now the tiny, immaculate Jewish limbs, now certain others, twitching . . . as they had been rendered to his stubborn imagination, slow to receive an impression, incapable of losing it. Then as he crushed her to him, it was another passion than lust that whipped his cheeks into flame and flowed like molten lead down his arms into his finger-tips. Then he was heavy with loathing for her. Then in the swarthy recesses of his mind he heard a Christian child wailing at the eve of the Passover, he saw the sacrificial knife making its deliberate patterned incisions into the palpitating flesh. Once her hand was at his mouth when the sight and sound, like a pestilent vapour, were suffusing his stubborn brain. His great rock-like teeth met in the pad of flesh below her thumb. She screamed, but did not know whether for the pain or joy of it. She did not know that his lumbering foot at that moment was sullenly aching to press her small white face indistinguishably into the woodland floor. Then some especial potency of her, the cool fire of her finger-tips or the odour of her hair, exorcised his demon. Their

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abominable love-making turned to fresh adventures upon the doomed contracting road.

She tore a strip from her petticoat to bind her bleeding hand, and saw, as she entered the living-room, Eli the student bending with her father over a volume of Midrash. Once or twice of late he had found his way from the *yeshivah* to discuss with her father some matter of textual exegesis. As the fine-spun reasoning unwound its length Reb Yankel shook his head with more and more cordial an affirmation. His wits had been outstripped many periods ago, but the subtle rhetoric seemed to dull and soothe his very ear-drums; so that before half-an-hour had passed he heard nothing but a gentle bee-buzzing which pleased him almost as much as the sensation of his daughter's hands upon his forehead. These rare visits of Eli to the house of Serra Golda, spread as they were over a period of two or three months, could not pass wholly without comment. For, apart from those interruptions, he had immersed himself even more completely than before in the dim life of the *yeshivah*. He frequently did not trouble to return to his bed at all, and after snatching an hour or two's sleep upon a hard wooden bench, he would address himself once more to his books, hour beyond hour, dusk and dawn.

It seemed that some secret eluded him, that he must hasten after it, all day, all night, all year, lest death come too swiftly and curtail the quest. What did he seek? He did not know. Perhaps in this forgotten commentator there was some inkling of it. Yellow page upon yellow page flapped like ceremonial banners down the avenues of his mind. Deep and long he pursued the investigations of the Jewish alchemists of Arabia and Spain. How to achieve gold from a transmutation of base metals. But

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he knew he must labour with subtler instruments than crucibles and retorts. His brain itself must be his mortar. With the pestle of logic he must disintegrate the crude stuff of his thoughts and the thoughts of those that had preceded him, into their finer elements. Amongst these he might isolate spiritual gold, the finest, God.

Reb Yankel nodded. Reb Yankel clapped his hands. Serra Golda smiled pleasantly. Did not his presence, denied elsewhere, lend her household any further sanction it might need? The gypsy cascades of her earrings jingled. Had a neighbour said that Leah . . . Eli . . . that she must give heed? *That*, at all events, was comfortably settled. Reb Nochum, the marriage-maker, was leading his negotiations towards a highly satisfactory close. Besides, the young people, had they even an eye to each other? Leah no more regarded Eli, nor Eli Leah, than if each were a chair or table.

Excepting this evening when Leah came in with a strip of flannel, all sticky with blood, bound about her hand.

"Leah, what is the matter with thee?"

"Nothing, mother."

"Leah, why so pale?"

"Nothing, mother."

"Thy hand, what is with thy hand?"

"O this, mother, *this!*" They were both conscious that Eli's eloquence hung snapped in mid-air. The young man was turned towards her, his eyes full of anxiety and foreboding.

"My hand, mother? A dog bit it as I stroked it coming down the street!"

Yeb Yankel sprang from his chair.

"Daughter mine, daughter mine, go and wash it in hot

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water with soap for scrubbing. Come with me, this moment!"

"A maiden," said Serra Golda, motioning her to follow into her room, "should be older than to play in the street with gentile dogs."

She washed the hand carefully and laid a poultice against it. Business took a brisk turn. She passed into the shop and out again. Eli took up once more the tale of sacred study. Then the time of *meyeriv*, the evening service, was at hand. Reb Yankel passed into the inner room to pick up a scarf, Serra Golda was entertaining a customer, Leah and Eli were alone in the room.

The young man strode over to her. She felt his hands close like steel about her wrists. She looked up astonished. He had seemed to be a mere wraith, a thing of spirit which had loosely put on flesh. She saw his dark eyes like a beast's stricken with fright. There was no hint in them of their eternal preoccupation, of the eluding secret.

"Little maiden," he whispered, "little Jewish daughter. Oh, take care, take care. My heart breaks."

Reb Yankel was fumbling behind the door at the handle. The queenly step of Serra Golda was advancing into the room.

"So you leave us for the evening service now, Reb Eli?" she asked.

"Yes, it gets late."

"The Above One protect you! Whenever you come, Reb Eli, what an honour for a Jewish house!"

"The Above One protect us all!"

"It will do no harm," said Reb Yankel, "if thou wilt wash that hand again, Léanu!"

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"Leave it a time, the poultice must do its work!" said Serra Golda. "If there is poison it will draw it out. So may the poison be drawn out of the flesh of all sons and daughters of Israel!"

The two men withdrew, Serra Golda following them. A sensation in her bones, so fundamental was it, told Serra Golda that a customer was at hand. The sense of premonition in smaller and larger affairs had always been of the greatest use to her.

Saving in this manner of the sale of two candles. No more profitable demand than that was made upon her as she followed the two men into the shop. Her premonition failed her that night in this matter of the two candles. She would have need, soon enough, to dispose of more candles than these.

II

How much did he know? How much did he know? How much did he know? The question pounded at Leah's brain. She had one moment of swift, unpitiful, unaccusing self-vision. She remembered how, when he had saved her from outrage among the reeds and willows by the water, her preoccupation had been that he, most of all human beings, must know nothing of the shame which held her motionless and desirous while her despoiler advanced upon her. She realized how deep, even from that obloquy, she had descended. Her concern now was not that he knew, but how much he knew. Then a spasm of fury seized her. What did he mean by nosing about like a fox among her affairs? Who was he to maintain a moral supervision over her? And whence, she asked herself odiously, did the sacred Eli get his facts? Did he not

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spend his twenty-four hours between the *yeshiveh* and the synagogue, passing from one sanctified portal into the other? Did he too slope into the woods at evening seeking a livelier diversion, he than the Talmud, she than grocery and knitting? The woods at evening. . . . The woods at evening. . . . Her taut body unstiffened. The words were more than words to her, more than the quiet noises of trees or the sky's grey cloak. Once again her blood ignited like a heap of straw and her mind rocked in the delirious bewilderment of paradox. Ribbed like an oak, gentle as grass. Like an ox in his gait, like a cat in his caresses. Sergei!

That night in her bed she laid herself prone, a naked sacrifice in the palm of Moloch under the towering thought of him. Nothing was withheld. No secret of his she did not investigate nor of her own she did not profane. She knew that whatever slavery her body might be subject to, it could be nothing more than a symbol of her spirit's more vicious and more fundamental slavery. She realized, for the first time so clearly, that this thing which had seized her was precisely an insanity of her senses, infiltrated by no most minute spiritual influence. She gloated over her degradation. Her fingers under the coverlet pursued each contour of his body. A smile lay upon her face as she slept, like the smile upon the face of Astarte's priestess in the vicious closes of her Erycinian temple.

Next morning when she rose, still her smile lay about the corners of her mouth. Her eyes were drowsy as if some opiate kept them so. When her mother said once and again, "Leah, what is it this morning? Thou are not awake. Thy father prays so slowly, one might think he sings psalms for the dead. Hinda has not come and it is nine-clock. What a black day is this?"—she did nothing

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more than smile back stupidly at her mother, having understood not a word. It was only when Serra Golda came over to her and shook her by the shoulders that she allowed the words to penetrate the mists that enveloped her.

"Go, Leah, I have told thee or not? Go and find out what is with Hinda. A shop, there is no greater in Kravno or in Terkass even, can one unhelped woman look after it, and a daughter and a husband to support, much use are they? Two hours late she is; tell her if she comes again late by five minutes, we employ another maiden. As for thy father, look at him in the corner there, how long will he take with his praying this morning? A good Jew says each prayer sharp and clear, separately, like a brilliant—yes, that is true. But he must let the accounts of his wife's business go to ruin by taking twice as long as any rabbi, *that* is not written in the passage."

Leah cast a glance towards her father, sitting in the corner with his phylacteries wound round his forehead and naked left arm. He almost invariably went to the synagogue for the morning services, but he spent more time there than was convenient on a day when the traveller from Kiev was due with his monthly visit; so that this morning he had been requested to recite the service at home. On these days Serra Golda and her assistant were busy counting up unsold stock in the shop and Reb Yankel busy with the books in the living-room. It seemed likely that he would distinguish himself less than usual that morning. Leah tried to catch his eye, although she knew that a good Jew must not be distracted from his colloquy with God. What were a father, a daughter, in the scale of such august company? She succeeded for one moment. He smiled at her, then nodded his head in warning and reproof.

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She made her way down the street towards Hinda's house. It was useless, of course. She had already warned Hinda that if she ate so many raw *pshenichkes* when Serra Golda's back was turned—*pshenichkes* were a kind of maize which only moujiks ate raw—not only would she be found out sooner or later, but they would give her acute pains. Hinda had evidently taken an overdose yesterday. A niggling, bilious little creature at best, she was down with an attack of colic.

Leah found she had guessed rightly and delivered a small but virtuous homily. Then she turned again to report the situation to her mother and fabricate a more discreet origin for Hinda's indisposition. Things slight as this, and slighter, held the forefront of her mind. Vast clouds and mountains loomed in its background. The more minutely therefore, she endeavoured to occupy herself with tiny familiar things: the baker, she hoped, had not forgotten her father's favourite breakfast-cake that morning, the cake sprinkled with grain. She herself would have to be busy in the shop to-day in Hinda's absence. Should she put on the red apron spotted with white or the blue-striped apron?

How the tendons stood out, like carved bars of blue steel, between his wrist and his elbow. . . .

Would the traveller from Kiev be the man who came usually, or the perky small-nosed little fellow who had once or twice taken his place? Perhaps it ought to be the red apron spotted with white. The blue one didn't suit her half so well, and the strings weren't big enough to tie properly. Perhaps she had better say ear-ache. She would have to make an opportunity some time during the day to cut back to Hinda and request her to tell the same tale when she returned to-morrow.

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His neck stood upon his shoulders like the trunk of a tree upon its roots. His hands about her waist, his mouth upon her mouth. . . .

The lining was coming loose inside her father's skull-cap. She had promised to see to it the day before yesterday. To-day there would be no chance.

To-day there would be no chance.

Here was home. Here was a woman standing outside the door at the side of the house. It was her mother, speechless, waving her hands. Her mouth was a small black hole. Words could not issue from it, nothing but a sharp, quick whistling. All her great bosom heaved. Her eyes were large with fright. Her floridity had ebbed from her till her face was yellow paste. Then words came.

"Thy father! Thy father! Thy father! *Léanu, our child!*"

Leah stood regarding her curiously. *Who* was this woman? Her mother, had she thought? What did the woman want? Then more piteously than a child with a smashed bone, the woman wailed, "He is dead! He is dead!"

She was aware that women were gathering towards them from every corner of the street. Their feet were pressing behind her. But there was calm in the inner room where her father sat on his chair in the corner, the phylacteries on his forehead and arm, and his coat, supported only from the right shoulder, dragging towards the floor. His neck was twisted queerly to one side and his mouth was open.

The dead man's daughter said not a word. She stood there so impassive that the women crowding behind her paused. So she stood for some minutes. The sound of

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Serra Golda wailing in the street seemed to come from a place leagues removed from this.

"Dead!" the women heard. "Dead!" But she did not hear. "He was *mafsig* in the middle of his praying. He broke in upon his praying and cried to me. Never since his *bar-mitsvah* has he done so. Oi, oi, oi! Oi, oi, oi! 'I am ill! Serra Golda!' he cried. And I went up to him, and there was a noise in his throat, and his head fell forward. And I lifted his head. Dead he was, dead, dead. Oi, oi, oi! Oi, oi, oi! Dead, dead!"

But only the women nearest to her wailed to her wailing. Upon those that had Leah in sight a spell had fallen. The girl had not moved an eyelash, her breast was still as if craven from stone. She stood there like one buried upright in a tomb. From far overhead, illimitably far overhead, where the enormous blue sky dwindled into one point of blackness, descended the noise of earth shovelled upon her coffin. She turned away from the spectacle of her father, grotesquely, mechanically, as if she were more dreadfully dead than he. She turned towards the women in the doorway. She spoke. Her voice was a hollow hooting like a nameless bird in a field of desecration.

"I!" she said. "I it was! It was I that slew him!" Then she screamed suddenly. So a fiend screams in hell. She raised her bound hand to her teeth and tore the strip of cloth away. Then she dug her teeth deep into the place where other teeth had bitten not long ago.

"Behold, women of Israel, the mark of the beast and the beast!" She fell at their feet like a sapling blasted by lightning and overwhelmed.

CHAPTER FOUR

ONCE there had been a red dust sifting down mysteriously out of ensanguined skies upon the middle and upper reaches of the Dnieper. She had been a child then, but she remembered how certain learned men had come from great cities to study this calamity. It was in the time of blossom, but cherry and pear and apple alike rendered to the sky affrighted blossom of blood. And there was no green grass. But a great opposed wind from the north-west had come. Rain followed. Grass was green again.

But they had told her of a black dust that came down perennially in the great cities of England and America, where there were chimneys taller than many many men put together, higher than three times the church in Prijni over the river. In these places, they said, there was no green grass nor trees in blossom. The black dust sifted upon hair and lips and hands until children had the semblance of greybeards and old men were dead long before they died. The rain that slipped from the dusky womb of the clouds was a grey ichor in mid-air and did no more when it had descended than distribute into a level monochrome all that uncleanness.

Black dust sifting down upon her, but deeper than hair and lips and hand. Sifting down through the pores of the skin till the heart moved so faintly in the thickening blankets which encased it that a glaze was upon her

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eyes, and her lips were not more scarlet than her cheeks.

The coffin lay upon trestles in the living-room. Over it a black sheet drooped. They swung it aside and lifted the coffin-lid, bidding the dead man's wife and daughter look upon him for the last time. The wife looked and fell back among the women whimpering like a puppy.

"And thou, Léanu!" moaned the women. "He is waiting for thee!"

But if the black dust combing the air like a torrent dispersed into a vapour of black lawn was so thick that a body's eyes could not see? And if the soul's eyes were so impious that they dared not look?

She stared away towards the blank wall, hunched upon the floor, her hands clasped under her knees.

"Sit upon a stool," said the women. "Upon a low stool in the time of mourning it is not forbidden to sit." But she did not move from the ground. Hour beyond hour she sat there, saying not a word, seeing nothing, hearing only the black dust fret and whisper down the starless concave.

"Come, Léanu!" the women implored. "In ten moments they will carry him away to the House of Eternity. He has no son to say the prayer of the dead for him. There is no son to say *kaddish*. Thou, his daughter, wilt thou not look once only, a last time?"

She did not move. How dared she move? One by one the bones cracked with anguish and the tendons snapped. The yearning that was upon her was more than the yearning of the flower in the bulb or the drowning man sunken into deep water, to gain the air. To look upon those eyes and lips which were hardly more quiet when he was living than now that he was dead. To heal her mouth, scorched and blasted in hell-fire,

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upon the silken pallor of his brows. Must he carry away into the tomb till the earth split the indignity of her prostituted lips, must she betray him once more and for ever with her nameless perfidy? She did not move.

"Tell her," they whispered to the mother. "Bring her over to her father. Is her heart stone? Or is she too dying? Go, bring her. It will be too late."

The tears streamed down Serra Golda's cheeks in an unceasing flood and her breast heaved gustily.

"Come," she implored, wringing her hands. "He loved thee better than me. More thy father he was than my man. Come, thou wilt let him go? I say, thou *wilt* not let him go! Do not permit it, God!"

A frenzy came upon her. She seized her child by the shoulders and dragged her cold, impassive bulk over the floor towards the dead man; until of a sudden the coldness and impassivity of this flesh that was her flesh passed like a current through her arms. She relaxed her limp burden and recoiled from her.

"Women of Israel!" she cried. "There is a shame upon this house!"

"Hush, hush!" they bade. "How canst thou speak so and he lies there listening?"

Then for the first time for many hours the girl spoke. "Verily, verily, women, she speaks truth." Her voice was like a dying bird's in a snare. So forlorn it was, so utterly broken, that the sobbing of the women in the room, which had been tumultuous, deepened into a low wailing not to be borne.

The girl went on. "I would speak to God, but I am unclean and dare not. I would look upon my father, but I am unclean and dare not. Mother mine, little mother!"—her hands twitched violently towards her

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mother's knees but wrenched themselves away before a finger-tip had come to rest—"let me not touch you till I am worthy. Do not cast me away. You others, be kind to me, though you should stone me dead."

Henkiah detached herself from the dark mass of swaying and weeping women and pressed the pale girl to her bosom. "Léanu, Léanu, there is no one we love more than thee. Speak not so. If thou hadst robbed or murdered, we should love thee more."

"Better," said Leah, "that I had robbed or murdered."

"Here is Dinélé. Take her in thy arms. All yesterday and all night and all to-day she has been crying to be with thee, knowing thee unhappy. Take her."

"Dinélé," she said, "little Dinélé least of all! Let no child come close to me!" A tear rose from her dull eyes and lay upon the parched desert of her face. It was the precursor of no healing shower. The fountain was sealed again. Once more she clasped her hands about her knees and her chin dropped upon her breast; once more her eyes stared upon the wall, and the noise of hammering and beating was dim through the sifting of dust. There was a trampling of heavy feet as they bore him away, a receding of all the dark tumult towards the outer threshold and the street. A loud shriek from beyond the open doors essayed to force an entrance into her brain. It bore her no intellectual message. But her heart knew it was the cry of her mother, the flesh which was her flesh. Her head drooped upon her breast.

The male mourners were returning from the burial and the funeral oration that had been uttered there, and the women were setting the low stools for them. Here they should eat and drink and discuss the virtues of the dead man, slowly, ceremonially; then, when evening was

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at hand, the evening service would be intoned and Eli would pronounce the *kaddish* for him, for the dead man that had no son.

Three times a day, for seven days, the congregation would come in and hold the services, three times a day would Eli intone the *kaddish*. There would be work enough on hand at Serra Golda's. But upon this day at least the widow and orphan must not be allowed to touch even a spoon. The traditional funerary food had been brought in by the neighbours, and now that the mourners had returned from the cemetery, the widow and orphan also must be induced to take a drop of tea, a fragment of the hard ring of bread called *bagle*, a morsel of hard egg. For that was the custom—to sprinkle some grains of ashes as a sign of mourning over these two circular foods that were a symbol of eternity. Even as David had fared, they said, after he had mourned and wept for Saul and his son Jonathan and had fasted until the evening.

There was a shuffling of stools as the mourners took their places. There was a rattling of glasses, a hiss of steam from the samovar.

The sound seemed to spurt into Leah's brain. She blinked her eyes and shook her head as if to throw off a deadly sleep that had been engulfing her. She saw one woman busied with the boiling of the eggs. Another had made the tea. Some one was approaching her with a plate of food.

"Léanu, my child. Thou must eat. Long enough hast thou fasted."

She rose. There was a slow formalism in her movements and in her voice. She seemed to be reading out of some book of antique ritual.

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"No one shall attend upon me this day, for there is no one here whose shoes I am worthy to lace. Let me take food around to the congregation, for I will be their handmaiden, should they permit me. Let me wait upon them, I pray you, I pray you."

There was a subdued excited whispering among the women, for the thing she asked was against all use. The old men gravely nodded their heads together and murmured. Eli looked upon her, dumb with wretchedness. Serra Golda impotently beat her hands together. Was there to be no limit to the strangeness of the girl's behaviour this heart-breaking day? Reb Chiyel, the town rabbi, nodded his head significantly towards Rochel, the bed-maker's wife. The cemetery had been exposed and draughty. His oration had been eloquent and strenuous. He was hungry.

"Let it be!" his gesture said. "It is not forbidden in the passage. The tea grows too strong in the samovar."

The girl wandered wide-eyed, pallid, methodical, from guest to guest.

"For thee, Reb Elijah, two slices of lemon?"

"For thee, Reb Eli, shall butter be smeared upon the *bagles*?"

She seemed like some young priestess who has just emerged from her novitiate and makes fearful oblations from altar to altar in the temple of her gods. That service performed, she sat down upon the ground again and resumed her unseeing vigil.

CHAPTER FIVE

I

“**D**o not perturb thyself, Serra Golda,” said Rochel, eyeing the egg she had almost made up her mind to buy as punctiliously as if tragedy had not darkened these portals only two months ago. But would it have abated the fervours of her husband, Berel the bed-maker, if all three members of the household of Reb Yankel, peace be upon him, had been found in their beds that very morning with their throats slit—and his wife had permitted herself to place a bad egg before him?

“It will pass, Serra Golda, it will pass. Such a melancholy is not natural. Never a smile seen upon her face, nor a light in her eye, the poor birdkin. But she is young and a female, and not even a brother left in the house. Female flesh is not happy if there is no male flesh to rub against. So said old Malkah only last night, and if she does not know, who shall? Has she not had three husbands, and she is seventy, and they now talk of a fourth?”

“It frightens me,” said Serra Golda. “Gold is not better than the maiden. I have but to throw an eyelash and she is at my feet, working in the shop, in the kitchen. I do not speak even. She was not like that.”

“Male flesh, I say, Serra Golda, male flesh. That is what you both need. Say not no. A Jewess like thee, a thousand roubles in thy pocket and there is no Jew

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in the whole province will not add another thousand. Then a shop can be opened in Kiev, should it so please you, a palace is not bigger. And for Léanu, it is true, is it not true, that there is talk of a match with the rich miller's son out of Terkass?"

"People *will* talk," replied Serra Golda with some complacency. "What for are tongues?"

"Let then the wedding take place after Chanukah. How much didst thou say the green olives?"

"For thee, Rochel, so cheap let me give them thee rather. Thou dost not understand what is with the child. She came up to me at the night of the new moon, and asked 'Mother, is it not true that thou wishest me to wed with Avrom the son of Zcharyah, the miller's son out of Terkass?' Her father, peace be upon him, must have said the name. Not once it crossed my lips, not once. Why needs a maiden know? I said, 'Léanu, when the year of mourning is over, perhaps the very next day shall be thy wedding. Shall thy father's line pass from the earth? Thy next birthday, thou shalt have seventeen years. Thou art growing old, daughter.' And she said, 'Mother mine, little mother, when God has made me clean. Wilt thou not wait? Shall I place a lump of defilement in my husband's arms?'"

"Tell me, Serra Golda, may I speak words of frankness with thee?"

"If thou shouldst not, whither should I turn for help, a lonely widow?"

"That accursed moujik she talked of, a cholera seize him——"

"To whom has she not talked of him, bringing discredit upon this house? I say, 'Close thy lips, thou hast said it. Why again and again? Who does not

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know?" She replies, "When God has made me clean." What shall be done?"

"But there was nothing between them, shall I so say it, nothing?"

"So should I live and all Jewish children. They met, yes. They . . . they kissed . . . a thousand black devils cut his lips into slits and place salt in them. She has said there was no more. She can be believed. No rabbi in the province can be more believed. Should I so live, could she but once tell a small lie again, Jewish mother as I am that wish it, I should be happy. But she is mad. 'In the spirit,' she says, 'in the spirit was every abomination. Lead me into the market-place! Let the people of the town stone me!' I ask you, Rochel. How shall my head endure it?"

"Be content, it will pass. If Reb Yankel, peace be upon him, was so much more to her even than her own mother guessed, how should not his death affect her so?"

"But a limit, Rochel, a limit to everything. The Above One knows, I come from no abandoned household——"

"Tsa, tsa, tsa!" objected Rochel.

"If the Above One was not honoured in our household, where in all Russia? Thou knowest, Rochel, who better? But to be so *frum* as that maiden has been since her father's death, peace be upon him. . . ."

"Never in all Kravno was Jewish daughter so pious. Such *frumkeit*, she is an angel, not a creature. That I know also, Serra Golda. Let her marry. Let it be expended upon her children. The Above One knows, in these days, such a mother, herself the daughter of such a mother, what might she not do for *Yidishkeit*. She will be a credit in thy old days! May my children's children grow up so!"

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"If there should be any waking her into cheerfulness for one small moment even. . . . Lo, who is this that comes? Ah, thy son, Rochel. How goes it, Kankel? No evil eye befall him, he will be taller than his father by next Lag Beomer. A Kankelé would like a piece of *ingber*, yes?"

The flood of Rochel's garrulity dried upon her lips.

"What is it, son?" she stammered. "Thy father, he calls?"

The grubby seven year youngster winked one large black eye, screwing it up so tight you might have thought it would never disengage itself again. He lifted a finger to his nose.

"His gall simmers," said he.

"These olives," his mother cried. "Take them in thy hand, and this bag of lentils." She assumed the basket of eggs and passed towards the door cloudily.

"Male flesh," she ejaculated at the threshold. "Without male flesh is every misfortune. Once married, a woman . . ."

But the remembrance of the unhappy condition of her husband's gall curtailed her description of the felicities incidental to the state of marriage.

"Hinda," cried Serra Golda into the store-room adjoining. "Thou wilt be till next week there weighing out the flour? What for I pay thee monthly good gold? Such a year on thy father's father!"

II

The piety of Leah, daughter of Serra Golda, passed into a byword in all those parts. Such austerities as she practised, such infinitesimal refinements of ritual as she

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feverishly hunted down and meticulously performed, were hardly associated even with the plainest of the plain old women, who had escaped or exhausted the pleasures of this world and had no other preoccupation than to provide for the rewards of the next. But despite her pale cheeks and slight body that grew paler and slighter as the months proceeded (and these were qualities which did not usually pass for beauty in their eyes) it was felt that no girl was her peer. Her beauty made her piety so much the more remarkable. There was one Rivkah and another, and maidens far more temperate than these, from whom they learned how frequent was the divorce between these two qualities. No rabbi's wife, or what was more notable, no rabbi's widow, no aged *rebbitsin* shuffling half-blind between her home and the synagogue, exceeded Leah in the zealous tortuousness of her piety. There were rumours that once there had been some dubious relations between the girl and some moujik from Prijni; the atrocious Sergei even, a few said, who lurked more villainously than ever before in the further ends of the village to fling obscenity at a passing Jew and the holy object he might be carrying, praying-shawl or phylacteries. It was a farcical slander. It could be believed more easily of some withered creature that limped and squinted, than of this girl whose face was a white lamp. Had she been heard herself to say such a thing? Nothing more than one of those desperate illusions from which the most pious of the pious regularly suffered. Had not old Reb Pinchas sworn, so *frum* he was, that he lay with the devil's wife nightly, and he was ninety-two years old at the time?

It needed subtler understanding than most possessed

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to divine the melancholy which clung closer to the girl than her own skin. If they divined it, it may have occurred to them that the ferocity of her piety had some connection with it. Not that she would have discarded her piety if her melancholy might have been assuaged and annulled in its complex exercise, for it had become as much part of her functions as breathing. But she might have regarded it almost as if God had intended it to be a loving-bond between his children and himself rather than a rod which they must inflict upon themselves for his own inscrutable grim satisfaction.

Yet as she walked along the streets and men turned round to gaze upon her, she felt obscurely that more must be rendered to God, much more, than had been rendered. She remained woman enough, for all her perpetual exile and mortification, to realize with dismay why they turned so. And if a *goy* passed her, a gentile from Prijni, he made the talk of realization more easy. *Him*, Sergei, she did not meet. The orbit of her wandering was circumscribed by home and synagogue, and he had not intruded upon it. He inhered in her brain not as a distinguishable figure, not even as a name, but as a foul horror from whose focus the world's blackness spread to the horizon's rim.

All that must be rendered to God had not been rendered.

She stood at gaze before her mirror, noting with perverse lugubrious joy how her breast seemed fallen in and what ashen hollows lay under her eyes. Her fastings and austerities were not of no avail in the shriving of that flesh that had erred so monstrously. Her hair foamed darkly below her waist. As she lifted her hands behind

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her neck to seize a great tress in each and bind them together, she perceived it had never become her so well; never had it been so full nor of so royal a sheen. For one moment she found herself luxuriating sadly in its beauty. Then she dropped both tresses suddenly as if they had scorched her hands like red-hot wires. Must she wait until marriage before their infamous allure was shorn from her? No wonder that men still threw unholy glances upon her, unholiest of women, whilst still she permitted this tire of Jezebel. She knew that married Jewish women removed their own hair soon after their weddings that they might provoke no lust in the hearts of alien men. Bound in the stern chain of wedlock they did not need to exert mere sensuous fascination upon their menfolk, who demanded from them austerer satisfaction. Her mother like the rest bore a *sheitel* upon her head, a black shining wig that lay close upon the head. Must she wait till the time of her own marriage till this snare of Satan was shorn from her—if ever God deigned so to purify her with his fires that she might dare to present herself to some honourable youth who feared God? Let him be some tailor's apprentice. How dare she aspire after a more exalted husband? For how many moments would Avrom, the rich miller's son out of Terkass, tolerate the thought of her, when once he learned of her rottenness? For if he had not already learned, God would not permit her to pass under the bridal canopy before she herself had told him the whole shameful truth.

This evil lure that sprouted from her head like a snake's crest must go from her. The thought took possession of her brain and body. As she combed it in the morning it seemed that her hair spluttered with tiny wicked noises. At night it lay on the pillow beside her

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like an evil companion whispering. It must be cast away from her into the darkness which had bred it.

She did not know what attitude her mother might take up towards her resolve. Serra Golda had shown some intolerance lately of her fastings and prayings and self-impositions.

"A maiden remains a maiden, not a male. What for wilt thou pretend thyself a man to be saying the Torah like this over and over again and repeating the prayers longer hours than a rabbi? Kosher meat is kosher meat, but where says it that a woman must beat her breast like a madwoman if the meat be one-tenth of a second more than half an hour in water, one-tenth of a second more than one hour in salt? Torah evening, Torah morning. Another Eli wilt thou be? Dost thou understand a single word?"

The thought that she might be pandering to the sin of spiritual pride kept her awake and weeping for three successive nights. Then she took her burden over to old Mimmy Cheikah, daughter, widow and mother of a rabbi, the women's repository of lore and ritual, an inexhaustible reservoir of antique talmudic ordinances which even the profoundest male talmudists in Kravno had forgotten or were ignorant of. From her she learned that the mechanical repetition of the hallowed Hebrew words of scripture had their own huge potency even if you understood not a single syllable of their meaning and were never likely to. Mere comprehension was almost an impertinence.

"What for," complained Serra Golda, almost fiercely, "when thy father, peace be upon him, and thy mother, waited six hours after cow's meat before taking milk food into the mouth and three hours after poultry meat,

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what for their daughter must wait nine hours after cow's meat and six hours after poultry meat? Who commands such a thing?"

For indeed from the point of view of housekeeping and synchronic meals Leah's zeal had its inconveniences.

"Thou must wash thy hands before and after using meat cutlery, before and after using milk cutlery. Then one of these in-between washings is a luxury, no? I am a poor widow." (The forlornness of her state was now one of Serra Golda's main commercial assets, being at least as efficacious as her earlier competent geniality.) "Are there not things in a Jewish shop and household beyond Torah and hand-washings for a female woman to take in hand?"

No, she could not determine in advance what attitude her mother might take up towards her imminent self-spoliation. Would it not be simpler to present her with the thing accomplished? When she passed from the house one afternoon with a pair of blunt shears concealed under her shawl, her eyes were clouded with no consciousness of double-dealing. There was more light in them than had invaded those obscure orbs for many days. But it was no joyous light of a windy morning sun; an evening sun rather, sinking wildly in the desperate west.

Whither should she go? What friend in all Kravno would permit her to perform this rite under her roof? None at all. With what specious pitiful arguments would they seek to arrest her hand? She found herself striding swiftly towards the river, clutching the handles of the shears so tightly that they made great weals in the delicate flesh. For one moment she paused while it seemed that the blood from all her body surged and collected into the base of her throat. A violent nausea

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overcame her. For she knew that there was one place only in the wide plains of Russia where she must perform her task. It was no place else than the bank of grass where, lying naked in the late August noon, he had stared upon her and called out with the fierce clamancy of flesh, and her flesh had called back again, like a beast to a beast in the obscene woods. The evocation of him in all his carnal actuality had brought a sweat to her forehead. She shivered and swayed, then recovered herself, biting her lip savagely, and made forward again for the loathed, lewd place.

Then had been palpitant summer. Then had the swift dragon-flies darted their blue and scarlet fires over the singing water. Then had the grasses been velvet and the willow-leaves cut from fine silk. Fit couch for her own body's single nefarious revelry, and the conjoint revelry that should have followed. Lord of Israel, the revelry that *had* followed in the lecherous close of her own bed where in her mind the grasses hummed lust upon this same grass-bank and the willows bent over into the simmering steamy water and their bodies lay each to each.

All was autumn now, sere as her own heart. Slowly the shears croaked in the loosened loveliness of her hair. More and more grotesque she became, her lopped head like a pollarded elm. Here the scalp was bare, here a bunch of hair still sprouted for four and five inches, here a tress still abided in all its sweet length down to her waist. A bird flew from the further bank, and seeing her, flapped his way back again, crying. The work at length was completed. Here and there the shears had slipped, making great incisions in her scalp. There was a salt taste of blood upon her mouth.

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"Lord, God of Israel," she moaned, "may this blood be acceptable in Thy sight!" She lay writhing under the wilted branches. Then she gathered what she could of the shorn hair and thrust it from her out upon the water.

"Little father," she cried, "ask grace for me! Little dead father, ask the Above One can He not. . . ." The words were merged into a low, long sobbing, unutterably desolate. So she lay there an hour or two, hideous, bloody, neither girl nor woman beside the mourning water.

She might easily have covered her head with the shawl as she walked back again into the village, for she knew that a woman must not walk abroad uncovered. Then she might as easily have left it covered with her hair, she said. This once, this once only. . . . And if men threw eyes at her, they would not be the eyes of desire she had herself sinfully solicited. Should they mock her, how much more had she not merited? She was approaching a party of small boys playing a game of nuts against the wall. There was Feivel, Hankah's cousin, there was Kankel, son of Rochel. Moisheh had sent a well-directed nut against the tawny little pyramid. He whooped triumph and swooped upon his spoil. One nut had been sent careering towards Leah's advancing foot. She almost trod on it. He lifted his eyes and opened his mouth to utter some childish impudence. His mouth remained fixed and round like the mouth of a bottle. Then the other children caught sight of her. None uttered a sound. Suddenly Moisheh ducked as if to avoid a blow from a demon escaped out of the woods. Then he took to his feet and coursed away like a hare. The other children followed, Feivel, Kankel, Shmul, all of

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them, their nuts forgotten, nothing in their minds but that grotesque image, familiar from their earliest memories, more dreadfully unfamiliar than nightmare. At Yussuf the butcher's corner a hundred yards away, they stopped dead as abruptly as they had started running. Then Kankel disengaged himself and disappeared a few yards down the side street. Then he reappeared and shouted something through the doorways of the adjacent houses. More children appeared from one quarter and another. They were all talking busily to each other now like swallows among eaves. Then, as Leah reached them, the twittering was accentuated into a shrill squawk of derision.

"Leah, the *meshuggeneh*, Leah the madwoman!"

"Rabbi Leah, Leah the *rebbitsin*!"

"She has the melancholy. Poor old Leah!"

"When there's a question to ask if a hen's kosher, ask Leah, Leah the *rebbitsin*!"

They accompanied her excitedly as she made her way home. Henkah came out of a house, holding little Dina in her arms. The child caught sight of Leah and stared at her for one moment, then burst into a fit of tears. Serra Golda might have heard the noise from the street, or the whisper might already have reached her. She stood waiting at the door as Leah reached home. As the bedabbled hideousness of her daughter's moon-mad appearance came more and more starkly into her vision, an ugly purple flush started in her cheek and soaked its way to her temples and deep down her neck. Her nostrils quivered with the desperateness of her wrath. The upper lip twisted away at the corner and revealed one large white tooth.

"*Mutterel . . .*" her daughter started.

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But the next moment her mother's hand had descended like a whip upon her face. The blow resounded across the street. The prints of the finger-tips extended in a clear scarlet pattern from the point of her chin to her eye.

Leah did not quail. The blow seemed rather to quicken her dull heart, to light up her eyes with a leaping point of pride. A smile, or a smile's ghost, flickered on her mouth for one moment. She looked steadfastly towards her mother, then turned her face, so that if she desired it her mother might strike the other cheek also.

How should she have known that she stood there like an inanimate symbol of the teaching of the most famous of the rabbis? How should she have known it when Eli, the profound scholar, the *gaon*, learned in the Talmud and all sacred writ, might pursue in ten tortuous dialects the obscure thaumaturgisms of the obscurest mediæval kabbalist, but conceive the luminous Greek Talmud composed by his predecessors in the Palestinian *yeshivehs* to be a futile or pernicious quackery?

Leah, then, as Christ bade, had turned the other cheek? But Eli, as Christ did, must stretch his arms out upon a cross. Hapless youth and maiden in your sequestered village upon the river-bank, among your green meadows, under the lee of your pinewoods, the years contract, the months are fewer, time is a chain of inexorable hours dragging as from a pit of doom the doleful day, the Day of Atonement.

CHAPTER SIX

“**P**oor birdkin!” sighed the women. “Poor birdkin!” They had anticipated it from the very day of Reb Yankel’s death, they said, and that sad business of the hair-shearing was only a symptom of it. There was nothing specific about the malady, nothing but profound weakness and a melancholy profounder than before. She had hardly taken a bite of food for two weeks, yet when Yom Kippur, the black fast, came, she insisted on starting the fast not from the evening, but from the noon, of the preceding day. Next day she took up her station before dawn in the synagogue, hours before the actual day-long service began, the service which only ended with the blowing of the ram’s horn that evening. Everybody sat down between the more important prayers, everybody but Mimmy Malkah and Leah. But Mimmy Malkah had been standing throughout the length of Yom Kippur for about seventy years now and one year more or less would make no great difference to her. Her bones creaked equally whether she stood or sat or lay down. But Leah started the day already looking frail as a phantom and no drop of water had touched her lips now for many hours. Several times they saw her sway dangerously towards the bench and claw at the air with her left hand. In the other her prayer-book was tightly clenched. It was only when they heard it drop to the ground and found that she

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did not stoop to pick it up and cover the holy binding with the statutory penitent kisses, that they realized she had fainted. Her tiny body was huddled between the bench and the wall. Somebody reached out an arm and prevented her toppling over on to the ground.

It had taken Serra Golda some time to convince herself that though her daughter was even distressingly anxious to perform the slightest request made by her mother, she was not going to allow her hair to grow again. Realizing that there was no help for it, a *sheitel* was ordered, a smooth mature wig that lay fantastically upon her small face and made it seem smaller and more pitiful. Those who had not already divined the girl's reason for lopping off her hair had it brought home to them by the spectacle of the *sheitel*. But if it had been hoped that that immolation and her Yom Kippur penances might have exorcised her conviction of guilt for her father's death and her own sense of infamy, they were disappointed. Now and again the tears would be seen coursing from her cheeks, and if one asked, "Léanu, what is with thee? Why such a child, weeping always? Stir thyself! Come now, Léanu!" you would only hear in reply some whispered broken self-accusation. Her girl friends would attempt to rouse her from her melancholy by attempts to carry her away with them on a gust of forced laughter. But gradually her sadness became too much for them. The laughter died upon their lips. They stole away from the room uneasily one after the other.

She would not permit herself even to take the child Dina, whom she had so loved, into her arms. And though the child's sweet antics would sometimes bring a fleeting haunted smile into her face, swift tears followed it. Now that there was no man in the household, it

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was not easy for Eli to pay a visit. But from time to time he came with his mother or his aunt and placed himself at Leah's side and talked with her. He could not bring himself to speak in so many words of her soul's sickness, much less either to reprove her for her contumacy as some interpreted it, or attempt to lighten her heart with an assumed gaiety. But he told her dim talmudic tales of potent words and sorcerers, of bright presences brought to earth, and for the space of his tale-telling the melancholy was not in her eyes; not in their centre, at least; withdrawn somewhere into their fringes, waiting to slink out of cover again when the evening service called Eli away and she was left alone with a darkness that neither the sun at high noon could dispel nor the holy array of candles on the Sabbath eve.

He told her again the biblical tales she had been familiar with from her infancy, but all tricked out with curious elaborations. He told her of the Israelitish wandering through the desert and what beasts, compounded how strangely, confronted them there. He told the gentle story of Ruth and the jewelled story of Esther or remembered some grotesque mediæval marvel. But once, delineating the half-human, half-reptilian demon that had battled with a pious Jew for his soul at the door of the synagogue in Lodz, he found her crying so desperately that he imagined he had been so clumsy as to frighten her. He must refrain henceforth, he vowed, from discoursing upon monsters so formidable.

He did not guess that a sudden memory smote her of the glittering tales told her by Rivkah in the evil days, of wine and loose living and painted lips in the great cities; and she had listened, saying: "More, more, Rivkah, it is still early. Tell me more tales of the dances

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they dance there and the gay tall men!" He did not guess she remembered the unholy fancies which had once rioted in her mind, of princes snatching a Jewish maiden on to their saddles as they rode by, with feathers in their hats and red tassels upon their swords. The last harlotry of the spirit it seemed to her. Tears of contrition coursed down her cheeks.

And for that evening the taste of ashes was continuously in her mouth and the reproach continuously at her ears. Though Eli might come again and for an hour the gentle insistence of his voice might prevail over those other voices, when he went from her they could not be stilled. So she pined and dwindled, and though to please her mother she would attempt to take food, she had no joy in it or anything at all. "The poor soul," said the women, "how long can she last so?" Gentile doctors were called in to cure her malady, but they shook their heads and said there was nothing to cure or that she was beyond curing. Certain of the elder women made vegetable ointments to smear over her heart and temples. "The evil eye," they whispered, "the evil eye is upon her." But the medicaments which hitherto had never failed with the evil eye or any black enchantment, were of no avail. She pined and dwindled. "Before the pass-over comes in," they said, "she will be dead. What use? She cannot live without her father, peace be upon him. She is not long for this world!"

She caught up the unuttered sense of their words, unuttered, at least, in her presence or in her mother's.

"When I am dead . . ." she whispered to them.

"Child, child!" they remonstrated.

"Hush! Let not my mother overhear!" She put her finger to her lips. "I have sinned grievously, what daugh-

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ter of Israel more? But when I am dead, will he not ask *schuss* for me, my father, peace be upon him, will he not ask grace? So that when I have stood ten thousands of years beyond the doors and again ten thousand and again ten thousand they will let me pass through to lie at my father's footstool. When I am dead. . . ."

She had passed from the scope, it seemed, of mortal ministrations. When she was dead, was her theme, when she was dead.

And then it was that the news was brought from Terkass that Moisheh the Good Jew had moved up from no one knew whence and was once more curing maladies of the bowels and imparting to barren wives the secret of fecundity. There was something superb in the simplicity of his title—*der guter Yid*, the good Jew, for even his bitterest enemies accredited him with miracles, with even more miracles than his friends. In the days when he had been a *zaddik*, a holy man among the holy sect of the *chassidim*, somewhere in Galicia, he had borne a more exalted title. He was no less than a *Baalshem*, a Master of the Name, like the almost legendary founder of the order of the *chassidim*. And like his predecessor, strange portents had accompanied his birth, rare potencies resided in the least touch of his fingers. He had, at an early age, attained the state of *zaddikism*, which is a species of canonization upon earth, and the devoted adherents of his sanctity openly avowed that within the course of a decade or two Moisheh the *Baalshem* would throw his disguises aside and stand revealed to the world as the Messiah's self. One morning he was found missing from the synagogue and would henceforth never allow himself to be associated with any particular sect of the

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chassidim or any one synagogue anywhere at all. Various explanations were offered for his disappearance. "Master of the Name indeed!" howled certain of those same *chassidim* who had once most clearly seen in him the actual lineaments of Jehovah which are the theoretic endowment of the *zaddik*. "Of the Devil's Name, yes, Master of Abominations!" Then there were the free-thinkers, who maintained firmly that nothing more was wrong with Moisheh than a sense of humour; he had found the prostrations of his votaries so inexhaustibly comic that he had repaired to the world's highways to laugh the joke out to its dregs. Certainly Moisheh's appearance lent colour to this particular interpretation. For though he was older than any one knew and though his face was lost in a thicket of white beard and white brows and long, white ear-locks, his cheeks were still red as an *izvostchik's*, a cab-driver's. His eyes sparkled with humour, and more than once, it was stated, in the middle of uttering some incantation or delivering some sombre exhortation, the words gurgled suddenly in his throat as a flood of laughter overtook them.

Those whose hearts were most completely given over to him vowed that the same voices had called him away from his seat of sanctity as had sung over his cradle, in the attested hearing of a score of neighbours. They were the voices that had instructed him so deeply in all the lore of Kaballah out among the meadows and forests by his native village, what time his contemporaries had acquired but the tenth part of his erudition under the exigent discipline of the *yeshiveh*. Render to all men and women, the voices said, the divine powers now spilt upon a handful of them.

"Divine powers!" the enemies of Moisheh sneered.

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"Children for barren wombs, eh? Children from whose loins, eh? Ask Slatta, the wife of Berel the parchment-maker. Ask Chayah, and she's nobody's wife at all. Ask Malkah the milk-woman!"

"A scandal in Jewry!" the others cried, shaking their fists. "An old man, should be long live, of eighty years, perhaps a hundred. And these outcasts would say that he lives a loose dog's life like their own! May a cholera take them!"

"He has the black art. Those loins will be fit for twins in yet twenty years. The devil will keep them stocked!"

So that all parties conspired to acknowledge his extraordinary powers. It was never quite clearly known why at this time of Leah's illness he left Terkass for Kravno so suddenly. The sect of his enemies in Kravno (for every town and village was divided sharply between his friends and enemies, whose one bond of unity was the eagerness with which they accepted his ghostly services) asserted that there was trouble again with some lady's husband. The opposite party declared that Eli had made the journey overnight and induced the old man to accompany him to Kravno for Leah's sake. It was notorious that the one thing in the world which succeeded in making him cantankerous was the suggestion of outside pressure. For it was only as the spirit bade him, when and whither, that he would seize his gnarled cherry-stick, sling his wallet over his shoulder and take to the road again. But Eli had not given him a moment's opportunity to get cross, they said. He had induced, early dawn though it was, a subtle controversy in the manner of the *pilpulists* (the peppery ones, as they were called) upon the subject of parthenogenesis. Reb Moisheh had never had much truck with those arid intricate disputa-

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tions which were the delight of the orthodox rabbis and were one of Eli's own main preoccupations; but it was known in the *yeshiveh* that the subject of parthenogenesis always had more than an academic interest for him. The mists of sleep were hardly out of the *Baalshem's* eyes before they were succeeded by the quick lights of curiosity. In half an hour he found himself pursuing both the theme and the road to Kravno in Eli's company and having much the worst of the argument (though this last assertion may have been less the strict truth than a pardonable boast on the part of Eli's admirers).

Certain it was that he requested to be led to Serra Golda's house and her sick daughter, not an hour after his arrival in Kravno. She was sitting opposite her father's empty chair—it had remained empty since his death. A volume of the Pentateuch lay open before her on the table. Not even Serra Golda knew what had happened, for Reb Moisheh had asked her, with that rare smile of his which was more gallant than any youth's, to leave them alone for a time. He summoned Serra Golda again after an hour or more had passed. It was all she could do to prevent herself from throwing her arms about the old man's neck or breaking down into a passion of tears. There was a faint flush upon Leah's cheeks, death-pale no longer. A flush so faint that other eyes than Serra Golda's might not have noticed it; to her it meant that her days were not to end in the sterility that had threatened them. The girl's eyes had lights in them again like distant lamps reflected in water. She sat forward easily upon the chair, one foot upon a stool and her arms clasped round it.

That night as Leah drew on her nightgown, her mother perceived a small flat object wrapped round in red cloth

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suspended upon her daughter's breast from a strip of ribbon.

"What thing is this?" asked Serra Golda, taking it between her fingers while Leah was still drawing the garment down over her head. It was a coin, obviously, and not much bigger than a two-kopeck piece.

"Mammanu!" said the girl, drawing away so that the amulet slipped from between Serra Golda's fingers. "He said, the *Baalshem*, that only my husband must touch it from now on for ever!"

There was something purposeful, almost grim, in the smile that lifted the corners of Serra Golda's lips as she crept to the door, in her tread as she turned the lamp out in the living-room and drew the bolts. A quiet was upon her that night. "Her husband only shall touch it," she murmured smiling, "only my daughter's husband!"

CHAPTER SEVEN

LEAH'S recovery was no matter of a week or a month even. That demon of melancholy which had been gnawing at her heart's core had been cast out of her. There was no doubt of that, even when the weakness which supervened upon its exorcism left her almost too weak to utter a word. But at least she was never too weak, when the women came in with delicacies for her, or her girl friends told what young men had sent a sly wink towards them as they issued from the synagogue after the Sabbath morning service—she was never too weak to smile her thanks for these bounties of gossip or chicken jelly. It had seemed no long while ago that a smile of all labours would be the most monstrous for her to achieve. Yet her mother noticed, and no doubt there were other women not blind to it, that it was only when Eli had managed to unwind himself from the talmudic complexities of the *yeshiveh* and to spend some moments at the house of Serra Golda, that Leah found fervour enough not merely to smile her thanks for the chicken jelly but actually to partake of it.

Strength urged its way slowly into Leah's body with the high heats of summer. Only one circumstance delayed its pace; Leah's piety had in no sense abated its exigency even when her weakness forced her to her bed and, lying back among her pillows, she seemed so frail that a breath might extinguish her. There was still

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no ordinance or austerity she did not observe. But whereas earlier in the year she observed them with a sort of hopeless fury, as if the more she added to her chance of grace, the smaller it grew, now she brought a sort of calm assurance to their execution. It was evident to a child when the Ninth of Ab came round, the day which commemorates with fasting and prayer the destruction of the temple, that Leah was in no condition to forswear food and drink for twenty-four hours. Yet although holy writ explicitly states that the duty of fasting does not bind a sick person even upon the Day of Atonement, no one could induce himself to warn Leah to refrain from it. It was hoped, but scarcely believed, that she might at least take a sip of water and a crumb of bread once during the day. In fact once more she made the fast graver for herself than the rest. Once more she began it on the noon of the previous day, not upon its evening. So enfeebled was she when it was all over, feeble as she already was before it began, that there were a few who thought that having survived so much, now at last the end was imminent.

But her cheeks filled out, the darkness ebbed from the hollows under her eyes. The end of the year of mourning for her father's death was not far off. She did not know how soon after that her young bridegroom from Terkass would descend upon her. But she hoped in much humility that, body and soul, she might not be too unworthy when the request came to merge them with his; not too unworthy of him nor of his honoured father, Zcharyah, the first miller in Terkass, the Talmud scholar. The thought of his learning promptly brought Eli, who was never far distant, back to her mind! Reb Zcharyah could not be one-tenth so wise in the Talmud as Eli,

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who was stated to have far outstripped Reb Chiyel, the town rabbi of Kravno. They said he could have had his *smichah*, his certificate of rabbinic qualification, months ago, had he desired it. But something withheld him, a diffidence, a curious unease which he could not phrase and nobody in Kravno, not even his colleagues in the *yeshiveh*, had an inkling of. He had not yet attained the secret he was striving for, despite all the immensity of his study, the secret that was so often but a finger's length away from his finger-tips, the key which should resolve the enigma for him, which should rearrange all its component mysteries in a new simple pattern, clear as a design of white clouds in a morning sky. It could not be far off; perhaps a sudden inflection in a voice as some one read a text so familiar to him that he had never divined its meaning, would render the secret to him. Perhaps it lay in a mere grammarian's gloss, waiting unregarded till some one perceived the titan significance of the syllables that had seemed an academic footnote. Yet this old man had it, surely, and that other old man? Could it be conceived that it had eluded Moisheh, the Good Jew, all these years? Might they not be induced to convey it to him? No. Of what avail? He himself must first stumble upon it; not till then would it be valid for him. His own blood must be quickened by it first. Mind, eyes, ears, would respond.

"Indeed it will be an honour," Serra Golda had replied, "if you will walk with Leah a little in the street. An honour for me also." He thanked her shyly, rubbing the cuffs of his black alpaca coat between finger and thumb. She had managed to keep her anxiety out of her voice, an anxiety she had up to now hidden from her neighbours, her daughter, even herself. It did no

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harm that Eli should come to the house and talk to her daughter from time to time, nor that he should be seen walking with her. On the contrary it had done Leah much good. Every one knew by now that the affair with the youth from Terkass was not to keep hanging over for long and Leah herself had asked once or twice if there was need for her to set about any special preparation. Eli knew it. Every one knew it. Only in Terkass all was not going briskly. Serra Golda had been ready to leave the shop to Hinda and one of her more trusted friends at a signal from Reb Nochum, the marriage-maker. There was much to discuss with Zcharyah the miller. One thing and another had left the negotiations in mid-air—her husband's death, difficulties in the shop till Hinda was well in hand (for it was necessary to keep a sharp eye on Izzel Chaim, the rival grocer), the months of mourning, but above all Leah's illness. The girl had been in no condition to be presented once more to the scrutiny of Reb Nochum or to encourage either the father or the son to enthusiasm should a meeting have been thought desirable. Had rumours travelled over to Terkass of these hideous reproaches Leah used so frequently to heap upon herself? Yet the people who did not care excessively for Serra Golda—they were very few—had been as prompt as any one else to acclaim them nothing but a symptom of the poor girl's malady. Something would have to be done about Terkass. In the meanwhile, it did nobody any harm that the two young people went out together in the warm dusks through the cut grass meadows and along the high streets of maize.

Leah had not known, nor was she destined to know, days more gracious than these that followed, so luminous

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were they and so passionless. It was a signal honour, she felt, that this brilliant young student should deem her worthy to present to her some of his most persistent theological perplexities. And indeed they both found with pleasure that there were moments when her freedom from academic sophistication rendered her capable of some acute suggestion that the possession of scholastic attainments would have made her too diffident to offer. She was the one girl among all the girls in Kravno, or among the women generally, who could compare with Eli in the matter of strict obedience to the letter of biblical and talmudic injunctions. So she might have put it to herself, but it would have been an understatement. Eli's obediences were strict, hers were incredibly intricate. She was never slow to add some new complexity from whatever source she had apprehended it, were it a casual remark of Eli's, or old Mimmie Malkah babbling over the candles upon a Friday evening, or Reb Chiyel droning his way through the Sabbath day orations.

It could not be, she said to herself, that God had not forgiven her. Would He else have permitted her this association with the youthful saint? She recalled the prowess of his infancy, but without taking pride in it for her own sake that this prodigy might be seen walking by her side; with no emotion but thankfulness to God who was pleased to transmit such sanctity to a new generation that the gold girdle might bind Israel together from century to century. Before the infant Eli had been twenty months old, the women said, he had been able to read the Bible, backward and forward, as he chose; in another few years he was a master of Aramaic. Before long Mishna and the Shulchan Aruch hid no secrets from him, and there was hardly a *lamdan*, a man learned

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in holy writ, who could hold his own with him in argument. There had once or twice been uncomfortable moments when he had asked questions of such pungency that the cry of heresy was raised by some disgruntled old *chassid*. But his unremitting observance of every least commandment placed him immediately beyond the pale of censure for all unjaundiced eyes.

She loved to hear his voice in easy invincible disputation from behind the women's partition in the synagogue upon Saturday afternoons. Then was the time when the greybeards and the young scholars gathered together over an informal meal of sliced onions, cold boiled potatoes and salted herrings, with a little *schnaps* to wash them down if some member of the congregation had been in a generous mood that week. But when he walked beside her in the meadows and that voice, for her own ears only, elaborated cunning parables and cited felicitous texts, her breast was full of the great goodness of God. The occasions were not infrequent when she perceived that he had so far pursued some side-path in the jungle of his fancies that he had become oblivious of her existence; nor indeed could she have followed him there. For her part she remained happily and somewhat proudly in the sunlit glade whence he had plunged away from her. She was proudest of all because thus she was assured that they met and walked abroad together as two Jews whose sole love was God and sole felicity was summed up in their meditation upon Him, each in his own degree. So she sat beside him upon the red spilth of beech-leaves or the grey of pine-needles, like some Heloïse learning her lesson at the feet of a Judaic Abelard.

Excepting that no passion made turbid the calm cur-

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rent of these days. Unclouded, unafraid, undistracted by outer rancour or self-distrust, their eyes met and parted and met again. They did not meet so often that people might say he slackened interest in his studies or that she neglected her household duties. They were like two youths, they thought again, who took pleasure in each other's society. So they thought. So they assured themselves, because of the pleasure they both took in God.

Some one had said that Sergei the moujik was dead, some one that he had gone to be a soldier and would probably never return to these parts. They were wrong. Eli and Leah in the woods one day saw a hacked tree shake off the leaves that lay upon it. They saw the face of Sergei define itself under the thatch of ruddy hair. They saw his eyes comprehend them malevolently before he turned his back towards them and disappeared into the wood. Now Leah knew that the opportunity was given her to declare unto God her gratefulness for the strength he had restored to her limbs and the sanity to her spirit. It would have been so disastrously, so despicably, easy to fall into a shuddering like an aspen-tree, to bite the blood out of her lips, to behave like an unsanctified creature not redeemed by the Lord. She placed her hand over her heart and pressed the amulet against the flesh. Then she drew herself up, lifting her forehead high. And she felt her hand at that moment seized within Eli's hand and held there, as if God had animated him into making a sign upon God's behalf.

They did not separate their hands that evening. Why needed they? Do not two male friends on an occasion, when the devil has shown himself among the tree-trunks, thus walk together while dusk deepens?

Once in a flimsy birch-wood, pale as flung spray, they

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came across Sergei again, not alone this time. Several other moujiks sat with him, chewing sunflower-seeds and spitting vigorously about them. A little removed from the group sat the priest from the church in Prijni, stroking his black beard, his black habit about him. Eli's hand tightened about Leah's. They stole away fearfully.

"Didst thou see the moujik's teeth?" asked Leah. How proud she was that she could with unquivering voice thus speak of him. Yet she could not bring herself to utter his name. Eli knew well enough whom she meant.

"There was naught else than his teeth to see!" said Eli.

The ominous figures of the squatting men passed out of their minds. What were they more than shadows where fungi spawn, when sunlight poured for them out of the calm wise minds of the rabbis, Hillel Hannasi, Simon ben Jochai, Johanan ben Zakai?

Full of light were these days that followed and like water that has found level meadows after steep adventures in the gaunt, craggy places. Luminous and passionless days. As if there is light without passion, passion without light. Yet there is a passion which flares suddenly like a lighted brand, and how disastrously. There is a passion which fills the sky with a sweet, gradual light, like the loveliness preceding the moon throughout the wide heavens whilst still there is no moon. And when the moon is abroad in the sky the mind does not recall at what moment the silver disk topped the sea's rim or the plain's rim.

So when Eli's lips were upon Leah's it seemed either that they had been there always or were not there now. They were not two flames that came together making

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a twofold smoke and sending wild sparks into the winking sky. They were two waters that had joined their currents coolly, two airs meeting. There was such chastity in his embrace and in her response that it did not seem that separately they had ever been chaste till now.

"My little queen," he whispered, "my sad and joyful queen!"

"Thy servant, O Prince in Israel! Wouldst thou that I had my hair as of old that it might be a cloud on thy face?"

"Thine eyes, my love! Only thine eyes!"

"May kind God be with us!"

"He is in thine eyes, my love. My proud queen, my little hurt birdkin. Thy wings, let them grow strong now!"

"With God, with thee to teach me flight, how shall they not?"

"The cool lips thou hast!"

"God hath sent out the flame from them that they may be cool for thee!"

"Let their coolness kiss me then!"

"On mine eyes!"

"On thine eyes."

"Even thus, O Prince in Israel!"

CHAPTER EIGHT

I

THE news had not had time to travel the muddy up-river roads to Sveksna, whither Reb Nochum, the marriage-maker, had betaken himself to arrange a marriage between a girl with a squint and a fortune who lived there and a young gentleman with neither, who lived in a remote village. The young man had a false eye, it was true, a fact which Reb Nochum was anxious to disguise from the young lady's family. But the last thing that could be said about that same organ was that it squinted.

Many of the houses in Kravno were still smoking when Reb Nochum arrived, for most of them were built of wood. If he had not partaken so courteously of the large quantities of *schnaps* poured out for him by the family of the young lady of Sveksna, he might have perceived a remote red glow creeping up the southern heavens from the direction of Kravno. The few people who were about at that late hour were of the opinion that some tramp or other somewhere had set a hay-rick alight, and Reb Nochum would have seen no reason to disagree with them. Kravno had always seemed rather more immune from pogrom than most places, for the town had squeezed out practically all its gentiles over the bridge into Prijni, and if the moujiks looked like

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trouble, nothing could have been easier than for half a dozen stalwart youths to hold the bridge until the soldiers collected. The soldiers had on several occasions been known to make their appearance before the pogrom had got seriously under way and actually to throw their weight in with the Jews if the invading party did not too absurdly outnumber them. It was true that officers and privates alike felt themselves thereafter entitled to heavy and continuous levies, but half a fortune was better than no head. Kravno had always seemed safer than other places; Sveksna, for instance, where Jews and gentiles mixed haphazard. So that Reb Nochum set out for Kravno that morning with no premonition of evil, to present himself before Serra Golda. It had been his business of course to keep his eye, even by proxy, upon Leah. Her illness had very fortunately coincided with a peculiarly recalcitrant phase on the part of Avrom, the miller's son, who had lost his heart to a flighty widow with her own hair. She had stormed like an eagle into the sheep-fold of Terkass, and when she finally left her eyrie vacant, it was found strewn with a rich down plucked from the breast of her victims. Little Avrom had provided her with as many scorned trophies as anybody. He offered her his virtue, which, after slightly soiling it, she threw contemptuously aside. After an attempt at suicide on the part of Avrom which convinced nobody but Avrom's parents, Reb Nochum had once more been called for. That was how he came to be on his way to Serra Golda that morning.

He never could forgive himself for leaving the village of Kravno with such despatch three minutes after he had entered it. It was true that a place which has just been consumed by a pogrom seemed hardly a healthy place to

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linger in for a benevolent old Jewish gentleman with a long beard and corkscrew ear-locks. For just as you could see wan flames here and there nuzzling and poking among the ruins like hungry dogs among garbage, who could be quite certain that those less kindly spiritual flames which had set Kravno alight might not suddenly break into fury again? And what was the use of staying on in Kravno, he had thought, when the roof-beam of Serra Golda's distinguished grocery stores lay indistinguishable from its door-posts? Not much likelihood of accommodating Avrom, the miller's son, for two years, as the honoured guest and recompensed son-in-law in that fallen house. Not much likelihood of five hundred roubles down and his own commission. Which meant also that the commission would not be forthcoming at the other end. . . . It was a cruel world.

Tears filled his eyes. Poor old greybeard, so to be defrauded of his legal dues in the winter of his years. It was a gross, deceitful, evil-living world. Who knew what abominations had rioted in that section of it called Kravno for the Above One thus to consume it? He turned his back upon Sodom and did not once turn his head.

It had been a pity. Had he made himself busy and agreeable, he might have convinced Izzel Chaim and Serra Golda, the rival grocer and the ruined grocer, who that very day arranged to marry each other, that nothing of the sort would have entered their minds but for his own tactful interposition. Of course the whole thing was due exclusively to Izzel Chaim's own magnificent behaviour towards his late rival during the course of that devilish night. But that was where Reb Nochum's professional agility came in. How often in the past had he not succeeded in convincing a lady and gentleman who meditated

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matrimony and would doubtless conclude it without encouragement from any quarter, that it was he and none other who had put that recondite idea into their heads; that without the employment of his services who knew what wild light o' love might not suddenly deflect the vision of either the lady or gentleman into godless morasses; that even if the marriage were brought about, who could be certain of continued felicity if Reb Nochum had not made the rough places of their temperaments smooth in preparation for the close contacts of the wedded state? But above all, and finally, was there not something impious, casual, beastly, about a marriage so libidiously arranged? Was it not a triumph of animal over spirit? Such a year upon all the enemies of Israel!

Of course nothing was more self-evident to everybody than the advisability of a union between Izzel Chaim and Serra Golda. The woman had no shop and much personality, despite all the calamities that had battered her vigorous bulk. The man had a shop and no excess of personality. But it shouldn't have needed a pogrom, thought Reb Nochum, to point out to *him* of all people that a widow in one grocery shop and a widower in another grocery shop were clay for his moulding.

Reb Nochum kicked himself. Then there was this business about Eli and Leah, who were already well on their way towards the frontier, Eli's house having been spared and Serra Golda's future being a matter of no anxiety. A town called Doomington, it was said, they were going to, in England somewhere. How had he allowed this business of Eli and Leah to develop under his nose, if only his deputy nose, without being aware of that good odour which in the past had brought him as infallibly to the spot as carrion from remote uplands to the place of a dead

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body? Reb Nochum kicked himself savagely. Then his heart filled again with self-pity. "I am getting old. I am getting old. And this young creature, Yankel, from Sveksna, my rival, who is not a day over fifty years old, will be stealing my best customers from me. Let the Above One pity me and give me my old wits again. Have I not served him well?"

II

Leah had not set eyes on Sergei for the last time that day in the beech-woods, with his companions beside him chewing and spitting, and the black-robed priest stroking his blacker beard. Still once more she was to see him under the reeling heavens, the smoke gushing about him in great evil whorls, and he himself standing there vast as a priest of Baal, offering a child's brains and blood.

The evening had been curiously oppressive. So men had remembered later. It may not have been so, but whither else for their memories, saving into a marsh of lurid vapours, can the sun have set to make room for a night so wet with blood and so dry with flame? Trees creaked as if terror were in their bones. Leaves clutched at the contracted air, more stifling now in early spring than in the electric heats of summer. Yet there wandered, head-high above the levels, cold premonitory gusts as if the doors of winter's charnel-house were set momentarily ajar. Portents in their backward-looking minds were invented and magnified, until certain old dotards who had been spared, and sinned woefully against God by lamenting it forever after, swore they had seen the sun and moon in conflict, though well they knew that then was no season of the moon. Chayah the old midwife was attending at

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a birth that evening and she vowed that the child was born with two heads. Neither the child nor the mother were seen again, so that the midwife could not be contradicted, and no one wished to contradict her. Those plainer minds who could not recall or invent happenings so monstrous remembered that there had been more traffic than was usual across the river from Prijni to Kravno these late days, and this last day most of all. It had not been flaunted in the eye or they would have noticed it at once and it might even have occurred to some one to be watchful or to give a mind to some sort of counter-measures, on the chance that mischief might be brewing. No, it had been rather a slipping of shadows from doorway to doorway, a whispering at corners of groups no sooner observed than dissipated.

Alas that upon the dusk itself which ushered in a night so dreadful none said, "Behold the sun, a river of blood is flowing from its side!" and "Dost thou not see where a moon's ghost has risen to join conflict with the sun?"

Leah had gone to her bed with the day's earlier infelicity soothed from her brow and eyes. She had been troubled by the knowledge that at the earliest moment she must speak to her mother concerning Avrom and Eli, and of the choice that must be made between them. Eli was a *talmud chochum*, a credit in Israel, but Avrom was the son of a rich man. Eli was merely the youth she loved. Avrom was the youth chosen for her by her mother. If her mother were firm in her decision, how could she transgress the covenant of obedience and insist upon her own desire? Had she not heard the Rabbi say, quoting from one of the holy books: "So long as one is not busying himself with the Torah, he is forgetting it." God did not destine her to marry Eli—who was she to deserve so rich an honour?

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What right had she to keep him for three minutes only away from his holy study? Did it not say in the passage: "Thou shalt meditate thereon both by day and by night?"

But his lips that evening on her brow and eyes drove from them their recollection of such stern words. And they lay on her lips cool as a blessing, sanctifying them. Had other lips ever lain there at all since the dawn of the world? She uttered the last prayer of all the day's many prayers, curled up like a child in her bed. "Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who makest the bands of sleep to fall upon mine eyes, and slumber upon mine eyelids." The somnific potency of the words crept along her veins. "And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thy hand," she murmured, knowing that no such privilege was allowed her, woman that she was, "and they shall be for frontlets between thine eyes." So they lay upon Eli's hand, between Eli's eyes. So had his lips conveyed their sanctity to her, to her eyes and hand. "And thou shalt write them upon the door-posts of thy house, and upon thy gates."

Duly written year beyond year, further back than any grandfather's grandfather could remember, upon the gates and door-posts of each house in Kravno. And when the folk of Kravno passed over the threshold, there was no hand not lifted to the holy inscription nailed in its thin metal casket upon the door-posts, no hand not carried thence reverently to the lips. Every child whose hand could not reach was lifted bodily there to kiss with his own lips the assurance and promise of God. "He slumbereth not nor sleeps." That night God slept.

Leah's senses were for several seconds conscious of a shrill, continuous screaming before her mind attached any significance to it. And when her mother's hand dragged

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her from the bed, the screaming, still shrill and continuous, seemed dissociated from her mother's mouth. The sound seemed curiously mechanical, as if it had passed beyond the register of horror which vocal organs are capable of. Then there was a black interval of stillness and immobility, Leah on her knees by the bed, her mother's hand clamped like a vise about her own. It was as if for one last desperate moment Serra Golda were attempting to think into nullity all this fierce outrage; could she but think so powerfully enough, there would be no moaning and howling and shrieking along the street, no flame rising out of houses already inexorably in its grip, no crackling of flame against her own walls, nothing but her daughter and herself sleeping in their own beds, conducted through the night's immaculate hours by their harsh or lovely dreams. Then she released her daughter's hands and cried, "It burns, it burns! The town! The house! It burns! It burns! It burns!" There was a swift gathering together of a few clothes by the illumination of the increasing fires. Noise and smell of the flame that was grasping the walls fast by now were about them. Heat was singeing their hair. They had thrust their way into the living-room whither the flames had not reached yet, and towards the side-door that led thence into the street. Steadily and efficiently as she might set about preparing the flour for a cake, Leah pulled back the bolts. There was a swishing sound as she thrust the door, not without difficulty, out into the street. A figure was bent over the oil-soaked hay that was piled there, a lit brand between his fingers. Not aware, perhaps, that there were women issuing, the figure doubled away into the street, then straightened itself and leapt in the air again and again and again, howling like a dog.

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Whither to turn? What thing to do? It seemed that the world presented to her, of walls tumbling in and creatures running, overtaken, struggling, sinking, was not the world she had always been familiar with. It was a foolish, mimic world rather, a stage-play. Runnings to and fro, sudden focuses of resistance, squealing, bellowing—unreal deeds, noises with no verity. Her mother beside her a pasteboard woman. Tears hastening in unchecked streams down her mother's yellow face as from a tap, her mother wringing her hands, jerkily, regularly, as if some one were pulling a string. A flushed scowling bear of a man was upon her, his arms were about her waist. He bore her down to the ground. The daughter stood still, tranced, as if some diabolic curiosity rooted her there. A Jew appeared, Izzel Chaim. He brought an iron bar down on the Russian's skull. The bear-like arms loosened, the fellow danced comically a few steps of a backward jig, then lay in the road like a tree-trunk. It was not Izzel Chaim, it was not Serra Golda, they were fantasies. So too was that thick monster lying there, a trickle of blood crawling into his beard. And that was not Henkah, whom a chanting moujik dragged by the hair into a byway, as if she were a sack of flour and he were dragging it to the mill. She should have her lover now. A clockwork lover, a clockwork maiden. There were no human beings, there were no human activities. They did not concern *her*, Leah, daughter of Serra Golda. They did not concern her because it was all a stage-play and no one had invited her to act in it. She stood there, looking on. What thing else to do? Whither to turn?

Then Sergei became substantiate before her on the further side of the road, standing against the wall of a house not yet consumed, Sergei, colossal, malevolent, tri-

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umphant. There seemed to be flame in his hair, all the night's evil was in his eyes, reflecting flame. His face, beautiful and hideous, was rapt into some demoniac ecstasy. He said no word, for the crackling and roaring of the fires were his words. But he smiled towards her. It seemed she was dead. Then, as he held up the child that had been pressed between his elbow and his side, and the light fell upon the child's face, Leah shuddered into life again. The child was Dina. Sergei had chosen well among the children on hand for his choosing. Then he seized the sweet, slim body by the feet, whirled it in the air about his head, the moaning, moaning air, and crashed the skull on the wall behind him.

She did not know whether she had indeed torn the eyes from out of his head, for her own eyes were blinded with blood when she leapt like a panther upon him. She knew only that her nails ripped like talons. Nor, as she fell swooning to the ground, was there any deciding, then or at any time—for she was to see it twice again—whether that woman's face that intruded upon the arc of her collapse was substance or avenging devil. It had no lineaments she could recall. It merely shrilled out of twisted lips that writhed scarlet on a snow-white face: "*Thou, thou*, hast done it! *Thou* hast brought it upon us, outcast from Israel!" She was only certain, when her eyes opened again, that Eli's lips closed them.

"Hush, my child! hush, all is well! The soldiers have scattered them! Be not afraid any more, little heart's darling. It is well with thy mother and my own. God has been with us!"

"Where are we now?"

"At Izzel Chaim's. Do not tremble, child!"

"Eli, my beloved. . . ."

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"My heart, my heart, what is it then?"

"She lied. Eli, say she lied!"

"Who lied?"

"The woman who said it was I . . . all this was I?"

"There could be no such woman. Could God permit it?"

"I cannot stay in this place. She will come again. She will lie once more. Eli, Eli. . . ."

"This is no place for thee, heart's darling."

"Beloved, beloved, what then may be done?"

"Not many days and thou shalt be my bride!"

"How have I earned it?"

"Or I a queen like thee!"

"Then?"

"We shall go to a far country. So was it written. We shall be wanderers on the face of the earth. With thee, Léanu, there is no wandering. With thee is home—on the waste seas even."

"Whither then shall we go?"

"There are many Jews in England. Since the time of the pogroms their number is grown greater than before. I can teach the Torah and towns will flock to listen. Thou wilt dress in silk robes. Thou who hast doves' eyes within thy locks. Thou whose teeth are like a flock of sheep that are even shorn. . . ."

"Are there great towns there?"

"One town there is, thou hast heard its name, no? London. There the people are as ten times the province of Kiev. Dost thou not remember? Thither went Boruch, the son of Sief the parchment-maker, when they wanted him for a soldier, and he found a Jewish daughter there and there is a family, and when God has blessed us, I shall send for my mother and thou for thine also, though

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even at this moment under this roof she and Izzel Chaim are holding counsels regarding the future. These may come. Moreover, in this season of great misfortune shall not other folk from Kravno assuredly follow?"

"Eli!"

"My child?"

"I beseech it of thee, Eli. Let us go to no town where there are people from Kravno."

"Say a reason, lovely one."

"She also might come with them, she that lied!"

"Birdkin, whithersoever thou desirest, even to world's end. A town called Doomington there is. I can remember no townsman of ours that went thither, though there be Jewish children enough, as I have heard tell."

"Thou art as a strong tree is!"

"Thou art water and sunlight!"

"Bring thy face close again!"

"Until the day break, and the shadows flee away. Thou that hast doves' eyes!"

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CHAPTER ONE

I

DREAMS go the way of dreams. Whither goes fire when it is quenched or water when it is run dry? Leah knew no answer, standing behind her little counter in the shop-parlour in Jilk Street. Dreams go the way of dreams. God had appointed it so. Was it not to question the graciousness of God towards his children to wonder why he had not converted dreams into realities?

Now was the slack hour of the morning, between play-time at Ealing Street School round the corner, and the moment when the factory-sirens surrounding it announced midday . . . announced potatoes and broad beans for carpenters, *ingber* for little girls and boys who had saved their play-time farthing to add savour to their midday dinners.

Was it because Eli was a carpenter he cared for broad beans? Mrs. Novik's husband next door was also a carpenter. He cared for broad beans. Was it the especial dish of carpenters? But Eli had had a weakness for them in Russia even. His mother had told her so.

Sometimes, when the Jilk Street industry in *ingber* had been really brisk, there was a square hunk of meat to add to the broad beans. Eli did not care for it, but it was good for him—planing away all day, and sawing and chiselling. God forgive her, it wasn't the work those hands and those shoulders had been created for.

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His hands . . . how delicate they had been, with what a deft motion they had turned the pages of the Mishna, the mere turning in itself a lovely thing to watch, if you could seal your ears against the sound of his voice.

Not that that was all over, of course. Still at night he went off to the synagogue and still sometimes he lifted up his voice in exposition and amplification. But he listened now as often as he spoke. And there is a difference, is there not, between devoting all your time to it, all your twenty-four hours it may be—the Torah comes before wife and home, the Torah is God—there is a difference between devoting all your time to it and coming home in the late evening from the workshop and then devoting to the Torah a mere three hours or four, your body still cramped with stooping over the bench. Your eyes are thick and filmy like the glue melting in its pot over a fire of chips. And your hands that were so delicate once, fumble with the pages, because they are now all coarsened with lumps and seams. The finger-nails are blue where the hammer has slipped or you have caught them in the vise. No, Eli was not too strong. Accidents were always happening. A little meat occasionally with his broad beans did him no harm.

Thank God, they never missed the boiled hen for the Sabbath, not since they had managed to set up the little parlour-shop in Jilk Street with a packet of roubles Serra Golda and her husband, Izzel Chaim, had sent over from Kravno. They had determined not to accept the money, knowing as they did how every year added a new member to Izzel Chaim's family, no harm befall them, and trade in Kravno would never again be the same as it was before the pogrom. But then their own little son, Reuben—four

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years ago it was, he was three years old at the time—fell ill, and what with Dr. Katz to pay and expensive food to buy, a hole had been eaten into the roubles before they knew where they were. Moreover, Dr. Katz had warned them that the illness would come on again if the child were not fed properly, the whole thing was merely a question of feeding. So what was there to do? Eli was working by the hour—so many pence to the hour, strikes and lock-outs were always readjusting the precise number. And the more hours Eli tried to put in, by some curious mathematics of the industry, the less he earned. Besides he was no brilliant workman to begin with; and when he tried to overdo it, the effort so lessened his value that the Imperial Chippendale and Kitchen-Chair Company gave him the sack without compunction and the Rosenbaum Cabinet Works turned him down after three days. There had followed five hideous weeks of unemployment. . . .

So they had used up the rest of the money and bought up the little shop at the blind end of Jilk Street with its shelves and fittings and counter in the parlour. They had bought up the stock also, but when they came to make a closer investigation (Leah had not inherited her mother's business acumen) it was discovered that quite a lot of it consisted of empty sample boxes weighted down with rubbish.

They might have recovered from that. But there was no chance of surviving the competition of Levitsky's, the almost London grocers, which established itself at the open corner of Jilk Street in the course of a single night. Mrs. Levitsky sold smoked salmon. The window which fronted Ealing Street (where the school was) devoted itself insolently to the sale of *wurst* and pressed beef. Mrs. Le-

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vitsky had a special meat daughter who administered these commodities, so that there was no question of non-kosher contacts.

The prospects were gloomy for the little hidden parlour-shop at the blind end of the street. Leah had not even begun to buy in her stock while Mrs. Levitsky, fortified by credits, was glorying in foodstuffs luxurious enough for the Cities of the Plain. Then of a sudden Leah discovered in a chance flash of her mother's business intuition, that her lateness was a blessing specifically conferred upon her by God.

Ingber came to their aid, that sweetmeat of cooked ginger which her mother had sold in Kravno for the peculiar delectation of its young, that sweetmeat with which she herself had so often regaled little Dinélé, little murdered Dinélé, peace be upon her, in the dead days of Kravno. *Ingber* came to her aid again, as it had come, by God's miracle, to their aid an hour after their arrival in Doomington eight years ago, after their desolate, speechless, brow-beaten wandering across the waste lands. Mrs. Levitsky sold smoked salmon, it was true. She sold pickles. But who in all Longton sold *ingber* now? Reb Sheikeh Pollock was dead? And why not sell *halva* also, as her mother had sold it, that sweet and sticky paste from Turkey? Serra Golda herself could have it forwarded from Kiev—or Odessa, wasn't it?—and where was the child in Longton who would resist it, once safely arrived in Jilk Street and triumphantly displayed in the parlour-window of Number Twelve. Nor need she stop short in this insidious campaign for the suffrages of infant Longton (with the particularly condensed reservoir of Ealing Street School round the corner to draw on). What about roasted apples impaled on sticks and dipped into melted

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treacle? What about baking *strudel*, thick to the crust with raisins, in the off-seasons between festivals, when no harassed matron had time to contemplate the manufacture of such complex dainties?

But it was *ingber*, *ingber*, all the way. Communications with Odessa had not been so easy as she had hoped (though when a new bale of *halva* arrived in Jilk Street, it went hard but that it meant a new black bow for Eli's Sabbath suit and a new pair of stockings for Reuben). Moreover, apples were not a perennial fruit, and the baking of *strudel* for commercial purposes, however profitable, must not be allowed to interfere with a Jewish woman's devotion to her holy duties. With *ingber*, however, she had an especial faculty. She could keep pace with the demand, without tempering its virtues. She might, in fact, be stated to have created the demand.

And what use at all was Reb Sheikeh Pollock's *ingber* without the breath of vanilla and the faint powdering with cinnamon. . . .

It all came back to her, standing behind the counter there, slicing the *ingber* into thin rhomboids, that first blank morning in Doomington, and Reb Sheikeh hobbling out of chaos with a gnarled stick in his right hand and a wooden tray suspended over his rounded shoulders. Grimsby had seemed Hell enough when they arrived there. When they got out of the great station in Doomington, Hell had fallen into shrieking dissolution, being itself confounded, being Babel. Swerving chariots drawn by great horses crashed out upon them from the black complex of streets. Men and women were encased within them or perched precariously upon their upper platforms. They swung umbrellas against the face of heaven and shook their fists. They cried aloud in a bastard tongue, borrow-

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ing from each of the seventy and seven languages of Babel its most occult profanity.

"These are even those," Eli whispered, "who declared 'We will ascend to heaven and place there our gods, and worship them!' Those also who said, 'We will pour into the heavens of the Lord and match our strength with His.'"

A grotesque, misshapen creature set himself of a sudden before them and howled into their faces, offering them printed sheets scrawled over with the devil's hieroglyphs. Eli placed his arm closer round her. She clung to him terrified.

"Have no fear, beloved," he said, "neither of the officers of Nimrod nor of the children of Phut, Mitzrayim, Cush and Canaan, they that built Babel. What if these say even as those others, 'Yea, we will smite God with arrow and with spear'? Yet them say! Come closer against me!"

But she knew he was as frightened as, or more frightened than, herself. What traffic had he had with the world? For her own part, she had seen people and talked with them all day, far over the grey sea and the grey lands, over in Kravno, in the shop there. In the week they called Easter, when they held a great fair at Prijni across the river, did not the *goyim*, the gentiles, crowd across the bridge and into their own shop? She had been alone behind the counter sometimes with three or four *goyim* in the place, thrusting their hands into the sacks of sunflower-seeds or lopping from its rope a bulb of garlic. "Why need we have fear, thou and I," she said, "God's chosen, Israel's children?"

It was a pity—this was not their own reflection—that God had not taught them how little ground was covered

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by their sad little hoard of roubles when once they had crossed the Russian frontier. It was a greater pity that He had not diverted from them the attentions of the well-dressed gentleman in Hamburg who spoke the most idiomatic Yiddish (the sequel proved he was not a Jew; or at the most that he was a converted Jew, which made him capable of still more monstrous villainies than a mere born *goy*). It was all about getting the last few roubles changed into sovereigns before landing in Grimsby. For the English authorities, if they did not confiscate roubles, taxed their importation heavily, explained the well-dressed gentleman. He disappeared to negotiate the transaction for his new and grateful friends, but something impeded his return. They were forced to sail without renewing his acquaintance, Eli biting his lips as the slow tears coursed down his cheeks, Leah sobbing monotonously into her hands.

Some profound sixth instinct conducted them from the Elizabeth Station in Doomington into Begley Hill, the region where the Jews were clustered between the great gaol and the crest of the gritty slopes of Longton. It was the instinct which made their race homogeneous despite interposed mountain-systems and oceans; the instinct which taught them, however little they knew of mountaineering, where the passes lay and how to surmount them; which taught them, however little they had studied seamanship, how a barque might be constructed and through what channels guided. It landed Eli and Leah, frail wanderers, pale, devoted wanderers, upon the pavement-edge of a squalling street, littered with the pluckings of fowls, giddy with the shrieks of children. The street bore the name of Green Bower. No one took any notice of the new-comers. The more frequent incidence of the pogroms

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during the last few years had made the spectacle of "greeners" less remarkable than it used to be, granting that had it ever been worth more than a half-contemptuous, half-sympathetic raising of the eyebrows. To have lived in Doomington ten months gave you full mandate to call the new-comer from Russia and Poland "greener." (The emigrant from Rumania and Austria came stamped with a certain cultural validity which removed him from such categories.) To have lived in Doomington two years and over dispensed you of any necessity to be aware of the existence of "greeners" at all. You had grown in to the fabric of an exclusive native aristocracy. You did not, by this time, live in Green Bower or the streets which curled away from it like the ribs from a spine. Or if you did, it meant that you were fundamentally and unescapably a "greener." You would not move into the refined fringes of Begley and thence to Longton, nor ever, by cunning stages, into those ineffable southern suburbs so liberally besprinkled by the direct progeny of the Norman Conquest, whence you had to walk two or three miles to the nearest synagogue. You never failed to get there, of course. But the virtue resident in your journey and arrival were obviously in direct ratio with the length of your journey.

These were discoveries not then vouchsafed to Eli and Leah, nor such as at any time concerned them intimately. There seemed no reason why they should not stand for some time over the gutter of Green Bower, nor, when night came, why they must not throw themselves down upon this great billowing *perinny*, the feather bed they had brought with them so far and so arduously, and be folded in each other's arms from the black street and the black sky. Everything was at once so strange and so

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familiar; and whichever of these it seemed more certainly at any particular moment, it was always terrible, terrible—too terrible to bear. Their loneliness in multitude, their unarmed youth at the heart of these old regardless women and these shrieking children oldest of them all.

She slipped her hand into his and found it desperately cold.

"God will be with us," she whispered.

"I will speak to one of them, no?" he said.

"Which one?"

Why should it be any one more than any other? They looked about them hopelessly. The women plucked their fowls. The children squalled.

Then it was that Reb Sheikeh came hobbling out of chaos with a gnarled stick in his right hand and a wooden tray suspended over his rounded shoulders. He came towards them splaying out his feet unevenly, stopped a few yards away, then raised a wheezy asthmatic voice.

"*Kinderlach*," he said, "*wer kummt?* Children, who comes?" For the main part they did not seem very interested. One or two suspended their noisy games and ran over to their mothers:

"Mammy, mammy, gib me a farling!"

Then the old man raised his voice again:

"*Ingber*, children, who comes? *Ingber!* A farling apiece!"

Leah's hand tightened desperately round Eli's.

"Didst hear, beloved, didst hear?"

"Are we not in a place of the Jews?"

She dropped his hand and walked quickly over to the tray. She turned her head again. Her eyes shone.

"*Ingber*," she cried, "like at home!"

She was a child again, younger than she had been when

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she had fed Dinélé with the stuff, young as she was when her father sat her upon his knees and nibbled at the same piece with her that she might crow with a double joy. All her breast ached with a desire for *ingber*. All her fierce homesickness was concentrated upon it. A foolish, foolish sweetmeat, a foolish maiden—what memories lay crushed between its hard grains, waiting till the small white teeth crunched and released them.

He came over to her. "Léanu, shall I buy thee some?"

So her father might have stood over her. Should Léanu be a good maiden, there would be this, there would be that, but *ingber* to start off the feast.

She saw his hand fumble about in his left trouser pocket. There was no coin there. She heard the forlorn jingling of the few coins in his right pocket as the other hand explored it.

"A shame upon me!" she said quickly. "Indeed thou shalt not!" Her voice broke as she said it.

"Sooner no bread for me this day or the morrow than no *ingber* for my baby this moment!"

He handed a coin over to the old man, and received in exchange a clumsy yellow rhomboid. In an instant her teeth were in it and had met. She was savouring the bitten fragment on her tongue. Her face fell. She was silent for some seconds.

"No," she whimpered, "no. It is not as my mother Serra Golda and I made it at home." A tear brimmed her eyes. "Try it!" she ordered. He was no connoisseur, but he felt it incumbent upon him to shake his head dubiously as he chewed away at the piece she offered him.

"Thou hast right," he said. "It is not as at home." He found himself attaching an enormous importance to the discrepancy. In a moment or two he was addressing the

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old man with a fervour he usually reserved for the discussion of midrashic texts.

"You will forgive me," he exclaimed, "but my wife tells me that the *ingber* you are selling is not such as they make at home! We have just arrived here, she and I, and we have not yet forgotten!"

The old man looked up helplessly. Leah broke in corroboratively.

"Indeed, yes. There is something missing. And you did not get the ginger properly to the boil!"

"I know, I know," said the old man. "Woe is upon me! When my wife, peace be upon her, was still alive, what child was there in Begley did not come running to my tray like a hart? She made it, you might think an angel from God made it—at the same time bitter and sweet, hard as a rock, yet it melted in the mouth. Oi, oi, what would you have?"

"And you make it yourself now, father-in-law?" asked Leah, her voice throbbing with pity. She forgot how tired she was, how hungry, how her back ached. "Did she not tell you, peace be upon her, how to make it before she died?"

"Who should know," he replied somewhat petulantly, "that she should die, a young woman, fifty-eight she was? And then when all of a sudden she lies on her death-bed, I should ask her how to make *ingber*, yes?"

"How should you," she whispered, "poor father-in-law!"

"And a grown son I have—the age of your husband he might be, let me be making no other comparisons—Dovvid his name is. Would you think he might be helping his father to boil the water or mix the ginger when it was boiling? Such a year upon him! The Devil knows where he hides himself months on end, and when he's at home,

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what irks him? *Ingber*? Such a year! Violin-playing, smearing paints on linens. Well, what would you? *Ham-isher ingber* I should give you—*ingber* like at home?"

A small boy swaggered up and held his farthing aloft with a promissory air. He stood choosing his morsel for a full minute. The old man waited anxiously.

"And they would be round me," he murmured when the small boy had made off, "like flies round sugar, while she lived still, peace be upon her!" Then he suspended his private complaint to resume his public litany:

"Little children, *ingber*! Who comes? Who comes? *Ingber*, a farling apiece!"

But the little children had tasted it before; they displayed no enthusiasm now. The old man adjusted his straps about his shoulders and turned his face from Leah and Eli. He was shuffling away, wagging his grizzled head about from side to side, when Leah placed a hand upon his arm.

"Father-in-law," she said, "if thou desirest I will make it once for thee, to show thee how thy wife, peace be upon her, made it. Shall that be?"

He turned his face incredulously. "There is something wrong, that I know. Thou sayst thou know'st what thing is wrong?"

She swelled with the confidence of her knowledge.

"Dost thou remember the drop of vanilla?"

"No!"

"Or a sprinkling of burnt almond?"

"No!"

"What, then, of scattering a few grains of cinnamon?"

"Cinnamon?"

"And while it thickens dost thou stir the whole while?"

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"How shall an old man think of these things?"

"Father-in-law, we have no roof to cover our head this night. Be once our roof, and the morrow I shall make thee *ingber* as my mother Serra Golda taught me!"

"I have a room like a hen-coop, daughter, for my son and me. How shall that suffice?"

"As God wishes it! Let it stand then! Perhaps if we find sleeping-space to-night, on the morrow. . . ."

"Hold! There is the cellar where I make the *ingber*. A heap of coke is more than one half of it."

"Softer than the down of fat birds!"

"Come, children, it is not far from here we live, in Crupp Street. Dovvid, he may be at home, he may not, the Devil knows. There is no traffic in *ingber* to-day!"

"To-morrow they will come running in from all the forests, children clapping their hands!"

"Forests?" The old man looked up, startled. Then he sniggered soundlessly. "Forests!" He beat his stick upon the gound. "This way, this way! That my cellar had been a palace, rather!"

So it was that Eli and Leah found their way into the cellar of Number Five Crupp Street. Many months and many months more were to pass before they found their way out again. But there were walls to it, and it had a roof. What would you?

"God be thanked!" she would murmur in that perpetual twilight, as she stirred the mess of thickening ginger. "If not for *ingber*, who knows where, whither?"

"Who knows?" Eli echoed.

She lifted her free hand.

"The Above One, shall He forget His children?"

A rat would pause half-way across the empty doorway

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of the cellar, on his slow saunter between hole and hole. He would fix his mild eyes on them, then settle upon his haunches and lift his paw to his face prettily.

"How should He forget?" echoed Eli.

II

Dreams go the way of dreams. Whither goes fire when it is quenched or water when it is run dry? Leah knew no answer as she turned away from the kitchen-fire where her reflections had half an hour ago carried her. She shook the black cooking-pot of beans she held and heard the last drops of water sizzling against the side that had been rammed against the red coke. Reuben would be coming in from school in twenty minutes to wash his hands for a moment before repairing to the Hebrew School, the *chayder*, to recite his midday prayers. When he returned from *chayder*, Eli also would make his appearance. She had got a large green apple for Reuben, the ripe red apples not being on sale yet. A strange child was Reuben. There he might sit for an hour on his stool by the fire, holding the apple between his two hands, and slowly, slowly revolving it, feeling its curves with the tips of his thin, hungry fingers that suited so little with his blank, incurious little face and the dead, coarse darkness of his hair. That was why he preferred a large green apple to any small ripe one. He could go on turning it for ever, following its curves to the stalk and away again, without ever being brought short by a tract of rottenness in its smooth hard skin. Then she would say sharply, a curious little anxiety gnawing at her heart: "An apple is an apple. Thou eatest, no?" He would come to himself with a start and search her face with those large, almost

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empty eyes. He would pronounce his blessing before fruit, slowly, articulately: "Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who createst the fruit of the tree!" "Amen!" she would add, closing her eyes. "Eat, my child!" He would finish off the fruit voraciously in a few large mouthfuls.

How had dreams not come true? Was it not her dream that she should have such a son as Reuben, so steady and exact in the fulfilment of all the hundred duties that had been enjoined upon him almost from the moment he could stammer his first clear syllable? Had she dared to hope it those days before he was born when she walked along the streets and heard these heathen children conducting their unsanctified game on the Sabbath, on the festivals, even? They held coins in their hands on the holy days to buy sweets at some gentile shop. Who could tell (she shuddered) what greases of what loathly creatures had been used in their concoction? Once, on the Passover, she had seen a Jewish child with a piece of leavened bread in his hands. She held her hand to her heart at the recollection. She had almost swooned.

Was it not to be expected that Reuben should be the proper Jew he was, being his father's son? Of course you could not hope he would be a learned doctor in the Talmud at seven, as Eli had been. That belonged, alas, to other skies, to other airs than these. And how should there be a second Eli, in one century, even his own son? Enough that there was no prayer the child neglected, from the "nail-water" in the morning when he awoke, to the "Hear, O Israel" he intoned with the bed-sheet covering his head, before he curled himself up in bed for the night. Such a father, such a father . . . and when the time came for the boy's confirmation, he too, like his father, would

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assume his phylacteries and never, saving on the specified days, would remit them, whether God appointed hunger and sickness for him or purple and fine linen? Never would remit them till the last "Hear, O Israel" would be said and the clay was on his eyes.

She poked at the fire crossly. A scandal upon her for a Jewish mother thinking of her child thus. What then of the red-cheeked wife, an ornament to Israel, that kind God held in store for him? Such a dowry she brought, such bed-sheets and pillow-slips and beakers and spoons, so virtuous a Jewess was she (this above all) to her finger-nails and toe-nails, that all Jilk Street and all Begley and all Jewish Doomington talked of nothing else for months before and after their wedding. What then of the first-born, the service for his redemption, the service at the circumcision, his first learning of the Holy Alphabet? . . . What of the other children one after the other? (Reuben and his wife would be more fortunate than they had been.) What bright-eyed children they should bear, chubby as geese, their grandfather's grandchildren in piety and wisdom, little Jewish lads and maidens such as trod the green meadows of Kravno, the green meadows also of Zion!

She stood by the table cutting up the loaf. If he would only eat properly! She sighed. She knew her thoughts had circled round again to the point from which they had started, they had traced once more the vicious circle they had trodden so persistently, so sinfully these seven and eight years. Dreams go the way of dreams. What dreams they had had! Was he not to be the young wonder-rabbi of Doomington? But the old rabbis were too deeply and comfortably rooted to make room for a pale young stranger from a town they had hardly heard

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of. They felt at more than one point the disadvantage of arriving among a community of Jews where none of their own townsmen seemed to have preceded them. Leah had, in fact, suggested that they should migrate to Sheffield, to London, where they would not be absolute strangers, for families they had known were already settled there or meditated settling. But he was aware of the ghoulish terror her own suggestion produced in her, how her veins ran cold. He had not forgotten that stark night of pogrom. . . .

"Eli!" she had cried.

"My child?"

"I beseech it of thee, Eli. Let us go to no town where there are people from Kravno!"

"Say a reason, lovely one!"

There would be no need for her to say it a second time. . . .

Besides, where was the money to come from to migrate even from Reb Sheikeh's cellar in Crupp Street to a back attic in Green Bower? He had made the effort to become a *rebbe*, a teacher of the young. People from their own town might have conquered their reluctance against consigning their children to a *chayder*, a Hebrew School, conducted in a cellar. But emigrants from Lodz or Ekaterinoslav felt themselves called on to favour the claims of their own townsmen, particularly as the proportion of *rebbis* to boys seemed two to one. So many more people were desirous of imparting Hebrew learning than of acquiring it.

Not that Eli's enormous learning was not handsomely and humbly acknowledged, particularly in the small synagogue called the *Ukrainer Chevrah*, where he had taken up an inconspicuous seat near the door till the elders declared it scandalous that so much learning should occupy

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so mean a place and he was set not many benches away from the Holy Ark itself. Several parents had even consigned their children to Reb Eli's *chayder*, deeming that the *rebbe's* rare virtues, despite their outlandish origin, made up for the faulty hygiene of the theatre in which they would be practised. But, to be brief, Eli's *chayder* had been a failure. He did not possess the faculty of distinguishing one boy from another. He did not insist on punctuality, the prime merit of *chayders* and *rebbis* (for only by prompt and protracted attendance at *chayders* is the sinful pupil compelled to cut short those abominable practices of football, marbles, and buttons which lead ultimately—if not rigidly controlled—to apostasy and the gallows). Nor could he refrain from initiating before an audience of three small boys who had hardly learned to piece together their syllables a subtle harangue on talmudic, civil or criminal law.

The last pupil hung on dubiously for a fortnight, then died of pneumonia incurred by a bathe in a brick-croft pond which the boy had plunged into one damp evening sooner than plunge in Reb Eli's company into the philosophy of Rashi and Maimonides. No further parent in Green Bower or its vicinity deeming it advisable to submit his children to Reb Eli's spiritual guidance, the two young people found it difficult to live on the proportion of the profits from *ingber* set aside by Reb Sheikeh for the use of its manufacturer. (He had allowed the whole process, save its actual sale, to devolve on Leah from the beginning.)

Then it was that young Dovvid Pollock had made one of his periodic appearances out of the void. He leaned indolently against the door-post of the cellar. "It is my caprice," he said, "to become a carpenter. An intriguing

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profession, I think. I prefer the Galilean to the pre-Raphaelite mode from the point of view of abstract decoration. My reference is, of course, to Holman Hunt's somewhat tepid composition. A fortnight will suffice for me, probably. Have you any feelings on the matter, Eli?"

Leah hardly ever understood a word Dovvid said. To begin with he talked in German, only very rarely adulterating it with Yiddish when for any special reason he desired to make himself completely intelligible to his listener. And quite frequently, as if especially to put her out of the orbit of conversation, he persisted in talking English to Eli, even a month or two after Eli's arrival in Doomington, and insisted upon receiving his reply in the same language. Though Eli had never previously experimented in the art of acquiring a new modern language, his astonishing success with English proved that the gift of languages was merely an aspect, an automatic function almost, of his mental equipment. He seemed less to learn the language deliberately than to find the faculty of it inhering upon his tongue. An observer might have deemed it less astonishing than uncanny. However highly he ranked Eli's native intelligence he could not have repressed an odd fancy at the spectacle of Eli's pale and sensitive face turned upward to the swarthy and shaggy head of Dovvid Pollock, set hugely on his shoulders. The black brilliance of Dovvid's eyes, shining from between the fallen jagged masses of hair, could not but have confirmed the fancy. He would have deemed that Dovvid Pollock *willed*—he would have found no other word—that Eli should apprehend this new faculty and become possessed of it to the roots of his mind. He might have detected a phantom flicker of mirth dancing eerily along the jetty surfaces of those same eyes.

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"It is my caprice," said Dovvid Pollock, "to become a carpenter."

"Caprice!" The observer would have isolated the word, clung to it. He would have felt a curious contraction of the scalp behind his ears. He would in later years have wondered, "Was that a foreboding of this dark drama in Doomington? Or was it merely some wandering miasma out of those subterrene damps that affected me?"

But Leah did not understand English. Dovvid Pollock gratified his caprice and became a carpenter for a fortnight. Eli, the incomparable scholar out of Kravno by the Dnieper, became a carpenter for many a month and year—till a more potent preoccupation called him from his bench, as it had called another of the same race and mystery, to the agony in the brick-croft and the spitting faces at street corners.

III

She looked upon them with a quiet, subdued bliss as they sat side by side on the springless sofa eating their dinner. What Jewish wife and mother could expect a greater *nachuss*?—(untranslatable word, let no attempt be made upon it). What a shy secret smile the child had for her when he came in from school; and how, when the father followed, those older but not less childish lips were pursed to give her a faint kiss of salutation and to receive it. For them the feverish contacts of less devoted and disciplined beings were too much and not enough. What joy it was to see them washing their hands together in preparation for the meal, to hear them recite the blessings together before and after; to know that whosoever might

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fail in these holy duties in Begley or in all Doomington, her husband and her son each in his degree were the servants of the God of Israel, when they sat in their house, when they walked by the way, when they lay down, when they rose up. What if God had not seen fit to appoint him to the place at the right hand of the rabbis, here in this new land? In the old it had seemed certain enough. Any other fancy would have been thought monstrous. The idea that he must some day earn his bread as a carpenter would have been considered by half Kravno as unbearably comic, by the other half as unbearably profane. Had he so desired it, he could have spent the rest of his life wandering as a guest from the house of one rich Jew to another, six months here, two years there, joining her for a week or two from time to time, keeping her always supplied with everything she might need.

She seized the poker vigorously. Was she slipping back again into a condition of wicked petulance? How much more had she to thank God for than most women? She took in a swift vision of the charred relic of their home in Kravno, of the rheumy cellar in Green Bower. Then her eye embraced the warm little kitchen they sat in. There was a mirror on the mantelpiece flanked on each side by two brass candlesticks and one brass tray, a queen's dower. There was the brass mortar and pestle that had been recovered from the ashes. There was a chair by the fire-guard with four sound legs. It had been Eli's own proud privilege, when he had attained sufficient mastery of his craft, to supply the chair with a coherent wooden seat instead of the cheap cane which little Reuben had slipped through on one occasion, and it was all the neighbours and she could do to separate them without irretrievably damaging either. There was, unaccountably, a col-

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oured glazed shoe from Quimper in Brittany, hanging from a pale pink ribbon. There was a picture of Moses, contemplating the Tablets of the Law. She had not been quite certain about the Moses. He was not wearing a hat. In fact she had found it difficult at first to convince herself that it *could* be Moses who was so inadequately attired for so sacred a contemplation. Maggie, the fire-goyah (she who attended to the fire on Friday evenings and the Sabbath, and was more learned in the by-ways of Jewish lore than many of her employers), pointed out to her that the Shield of David, which consist of two crossed triangles, was sewn on to the patriarch's breast. Undeterred by the anachronism, Leah promptly gave Moses the place of honour between the faded portraits of her parents on the main wall opposite the fire. Then there was the table, with a blue and red chequered cloth to cover it on ceremonial occasions. And another chair by the table. And above all, the sofa. It had no springs. The American cloth was patched in several places. It was not quite certain in one leg. But there were only three sofas in Jilk Street. And she possessed one. . . .

"A few more broad beans, Eli, no?"

He did not hear. These books, these books. . . . This one was in English, too. The English language had at first given her as many qualms as the hatless Moses. Could anything seemly, of good report, be put together in such a language when, spoken, it created such dissonance? Eli pointed out that *Chumish*, the Pentateuch, had found its way into that language, even some portions of the Talmud. She needed some convincing that it was not a degradation to those scriptures. Yiddish, obviously, even Russian . . . but English? She still shook her head from time to time at the spectacle of her Jewish table

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littered with outlandish writ. French books too, German . . . but that language seemed to have borrowed a good deal of its vocabulary, however inefficiently, from Yiddish . . . German also could be condoned. But what necessity was there at all for any of them? What must possess Dovvid Pollock to bring in these stumpy volumes? Were not the huge Hebrew folios piled in the cupboard behind the sofa enough? And these were books indeed, they smelled like books, not like waterproof factories. Their pages reverently turned from generation to generation were worn down into the thinnest of fine silk. The little fingers of Reuben in their day should make them finer still. They were often on the table together, the old books and the new. You might see him nosing along a page of one of these foreign books, delicately, like a hound scenting a trail. Then he would pause and sniff inquiringly. (There was time enough for these pastimes. On Sunday mornings, for instance, before the greybeards had gathered in the synagogue! Or an hour or two before going to work, when Leah, after long supplication, permitted it. And were there not always strikes or lock-outs to assist a student-carpenter in the prosecution of his studies?) He would sniff inquiringly and pause. He would double back to some great Hebrew tome, turn the pages rapidly till he attained the passage he needed. A phantom smile played upon his lips a moment. But he had not found all he sought for. He was down at his texts again, scouring over wide expanses like a hare, or like a mole burrowing deeply. Blind, still blind, he seemed to be saying then: When will the vision at last be granted me? Or has it been granted? Am I obdurate?

"Eli, I say again, beloved, a few more broad beans?"

He looked up from the volume he had been reading. It

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was entitled *The Critique of Pure Reason*, the author being Immanuel Kant. He smiled wanly.

"My maiden," he said, "forgive a wicked, wicked husband!"

He reached his plate forward. Their fingers touched as she extended hers. He forgot the plate that was to be replenished, she for a few moments forgot the pot that was to replenish it. Their fingers played together for a swift passage like ten pale children. Then she remembered the pot again.

"Child, child!" she admonished. She emptied the last beans on to his plate. Then she said, "And for thee, Reuben, is a great green apple!"

The boy lifted his eyes gravely.

"What a lovely muvver I've got!" he said, pondering the words slowly, as if they were a philosophic issue. "What a lovely muvver I've got!" Then he added slowly and reflectively as before, passing his finger-tips round the apple as was his wont, "Nobody in the world's got a nicer farver and muvver than me. Not nobody in the world!"

"An apple is an apple," she said. "Eat, child, eat." She spoke more harshly than she had intended. Had she not spoken so, she knew that she must have wept in her joy and pain.

CHAPTER TWO

IT was fortunate that there was at least a lamp-post on Eli's picket, something to lean against. The strike had been in progress nine days, and they were already saying there was some talk of a settlement. The last one, only five months ago, had lasted nine weeks, though the secretary of the Union had assured them that the Victoria Cabinet Works couldn't possibly last out more than a week. Thank God for *ingber*. What did the poor wretches do whose families were forced to exist on the few shillings dole the Union managed to scrape together?

Forward ten paces. Back again. Lamp-post. It was something of a farce. Who would want to blackleg at the Victoria Cabinet Works while there was . . . while there was almost anything else in the world to do? These hours of picketing might be rendered tolerable if only a man was allowed to read. They didn't publish the Talmud or Hegel in volumes that slipped into the pocket. The idea was almost unseemly. They were intended for low tables and dark rooms and a lamp, for a man's body and soul bent in reverence before them, all the long hours between midnight and dawn. Not to be furtively lifted from his jacket-pocket (if he could happen to find a primer or something that would just squeeze in) by a common carpenter on picket-duty till a red-faced, stubbly-chinned, beer-reeking strike-official came thumping along and flung the book into the gutter:

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"Blast tha' bluddy eyes, sheeny! Art on picket or noa? Dost tha' think thar't at school still, mebbe?"

"I was only . . . I was only. . . ."

"Shovin' a gawmless gowk like thee on t' job! Wots Union coomin' to? Go and sook pap, Ikey. Tell mammy I toald thee!"

That had happened during the last strike. They had specifically warned him this time against a repetition of the offence.

Forward ten paces. Back again. Lamp-post. His eyes were open, wide open. Should any odious blackleg come crawling on his belly round the corner of Tib Lane and sidle along towards the door deputed to Eli's supervision, those eyes were evidently awake enough to give ample warning. So even the red-faced, stubbly-chinned gentleman would have deemed. So did not Dovvid Pollock advancing forward out of Tib Lane, and stopping at a distance of five or six yards to gaze upon him contemplatively, not without a sort of faint amusement, through the narrowed slits of his eyes. You would have thought even those narrow slits shed more light, a dark, fearful light, than the full orbs of most men.

Dovvid Pollock did not imagine that Eli's eyes were wide in the steadiness of their scrutiny for belly-crawling blacklegs. He knew what a mask they were, shutting out like grey window curtains from the knowledge of passers-by what inquisition was being conducted within-doors, how pertinacious, how hopeless, how passionate. He could also interpret correctly why a sudden shiver passed through Eli's body, as if a cold wind blew towards him. He knew why Eli's hand shook as he lifted it to his forehead. And indeed, he was not surprised to

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hear the voice of Eli exclaim, before the grey eyes had turned and fallen upon him:

"Ah, Dovvid, is that you?"

"None other!"

"Where have you come from? Why do you spring on me so suddenly?"

"Am I not your friend?"

"My friend!"

"Are you doubting it, Eli?"

"Doubting it? Did I say I doubted it? Do I not know how much I owe to you?"

"Why do you ask me then why I spring on you so suddenly? Would you have me send you postcards telling you what time at what station my train arrives? I do not travel upon trains."

"Where have you been this time?"

"I have been . . . I have been. . . . Let me see where I have been. I have been to the southern provinces of France under the Pyrenees. I kept sheep for a time for a farmer in a village called Pierre-Fitte. I saw a waterfall where the end of the world shuts a valley in, a great cirque of rocks called Gavarnie. The waterfall swoops like Lucifer falling out of heaven. I wondered if I too would break in spray and rainbows, if I swooped through the air a thousand feet for a thousand years. Or would I boil in Hell's bottom like the slapping lava of Stromboli?"

"Why do you talk in riddles and pictures?"

"I leave precise ratiocination to you. I leave it in subtle hands; in a subtle brain rather."

"You are mocking at me. Why must you always mock at me?"

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"On the contrary, I am not mocking at you. I am reproving you. I have no doubt at all of your subtlety. You proved it adequately in Kravno ten, fifteen years ago. You were never wanting in subtlety. It is your courage I am doubtful of."

"Would you have me go with you starving and thirsting among the mountains, eating berries and drinking dew? Had you a wife and a child you too might cast an anchor, though God knows that's hard to conceive. And when I should descend from the mountains, I have not your faculty for stripping a shoot and cutting stops and making such wild music with it as makes all the women weep and load your bag with chickens and cakes. I am not made like you, Dovvid."

"You're a more foolhardy adventurer than I am, Eli, in countries more desolate. And I should suspect that your reward, should it come, will be a handsomer than chickens and cakes."

"There's little room for adventure between the plane and the plank, the nail and the hammer."

"You are being wilfully stupid."

"Why have you come to scold me? Did I call you? The captain of the picket will be round sooner or later and find me talking to you. He'll think I'm trying to arrange . . ."

"You exaggerate your importance in their schemes. I said you were being wilfully stupid. You know it. When I said that you're a more foolhardy adventurer than I am, I meant—and you know that I meant—that the sun shines rarely on the lands where you wander, the lands of the spirit, over the waste continents of philosophy. Huge clouds hide him most of the day, and the day is short and there are few stars at night. But why venture

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there at all if you do not venture with courage like the prophets themselves, or the utterers of apocalypse? Like Spinoza or Descartes?"

"A miserable little youth from the *yeshiveh*, a carpenter in Doomington!"

"Pah! You tire me! There have been other carpenters!"

"Where then do I fail?"

"Ignoring that all philosophy, all faith, begins with one first wild leap in the dark, finding your feet planted on one narrow path under the cliff, there on that path your feet are fixed forever. Forever and forever your feet pursue it; sometimes when a path leads from it to burrow into the cliff's heart, there also you will trust yourself. You will even scabble upward along its steep slope or let your feet down below the level of the path, feeling desperately the whole time for the solid rock to support your feet again. But to leap into the dark, to feel the wind whistling in your hair, Eli, as you descend like a meteor . . . to alight . . . who knows? What does that matter? If the rocks are there you will not know for long. It may be there at last is the rich green grass below you, a few yards below only, the place of flowers you have been looking for, the answer to questions, the resolution of doubts! But only by venturing, by leaping, shall you find it. Like the water-fall at Gavarnie, like Lucifer who lost a crown, like Christ who found one!"

"Dovvid!"

"What?"

"You must not!"

"What?"

"You must not speak to me of . . . of . . ."

"Of Christ!"

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"I've seen a town burning in his name. I've heard the shrieks of raped women and seen their bodies split when the rape was over. In the name of that man."

"You will need as much courage as you can find."

"My God, must you still ram courage, courage, down my throat? I want none of your courage. Leave me. Let me be a coward."

"You must have all the data or you are no true philosopher."

"I tell you I saw the priest of Christ lurking in the wood that day. I saw his friend that night lift a tiny child above his head and crack her on the wall behind him."

"Coward! What have these things to do with True and False, Shadow and Substance, Matter and Spirit, Good and Bad? How dare you exile yourself from any signpost at all even if the road it shows ends in a morass!"

"Of blood!"

"Let it be blood! That is the coin with which Truth is bought. No, let me say rather, *may* be bought. Who knows Truth's currency? You? Have you read the Gospel of John? Or his Revelation? Or the alleged acts of Paul or Peter?"

"The book of the Christians?"

"Indeed."

"Will you get gone from me?"

"I will come again."

"I am a Jew."

"Believe it, Eli, Talmud scholar of Kravno, carpenter of Doomington, you are no more Jew than the man you speak to."

"What do you mean? Why do you torment me? Are

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you a Jew therefore or no Jew? And I therefore? Don't answer! Leave me!"

"You will have read those writings when I come again?"

"May the curse of the God of Israel be upon you! Fiend that you are!"

"Oh, but you will! For the present, good-day, my little youth out of the *yeshiveh*!"

"Be at my side, God!"

CHAPTER THREE

BELOW the waterproof-goods warehouse where Dovvid Pollock had his room the River Mitchen lay coiled like a black python. The owner of the warehouse had once or twice attempted to regain possession of the room, for his business was growing; but a ten minutes' interview with Dovvid had on each occasion convinced him that Dovvid's room was precisely the last thing in the world he wanted. It was difficult to understand how Dovvid stretched his legs or expanded his chest without bringing to earth some one or other of the crazy tiers of books that staggered and bulged everywhere between floor and ceiling. It was no less difficult to see how he managed to stand upright and take the violin out of its case which stood on a set of Latin authors a few feet from his table. There was a possibility that he solaced himself less frequently with the instrument than in the days when his father lamented its serious interference with the manufacture of *ingber*. Dust lay as thickly on the violin-case as elsewhere in the room. There were evidences that at some period he had also refreshed his mind with the arts of painting and wood-carving. A box of colours and a glass jar stuffed with brushes stood on a window-ledge in the company of two or three small chisels and a fretwork-saw. The bottom of the jar was padded with the corpses of flies, and convinced you that the art had failed of its

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efficacy. But the paintings themselves which those stiffened brushes had evoked would have made you feel with even greater certainty that within the limit of his talent Dovvid Pollock had reached a desolate, formidable *ne plus ultra*. Whilst he had achieved a sufficiency of technique to express, you might have thought, a wide range of concepts, he had in fact seemed capable of two only, or perhaps not more than one, the apparent duality being not more than the obverse and reverse aspects of the same truth, or lie. There were stacks of canvases against the warped wainscoting; there were canvases hanging crookedly on the wall between and behind the tiers of books; there were odd canvases piled anywhere. All conspired to present one set of features whether they were male or female, whether one or the other of two constant expressions contorted or petrified them. Either the face grinned at you in the last extremity of derision, or the face was smitten with a mute hideous despair. Another species of blight seemed to have befallen his practise of the art of wood-carving, the blight of total futility. It was not possible to compute how many months in the aggregate, how many years even, had gone to the reduplication of those insane carved cigarette-boxes which crowded every corner and cracked under your feet if you moved several inches in any direction. They were decorated with the most fastidious, the most pointless of arabesques, and would open with the most surprising secrecy and suddenness, projecting a jaw at you with a harsh click of teeth-like springs, in disgust at your solving their barren, silly secret. You felt that their author had gone on elaborating this phantasmal triviality, till suddenly he had opened all his lungs against the tyranny and had smashed the thing he was engaged on

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into pulp. Perhaps that very night saw him striding across the Pennine Ridge, his kindred hair riding the wind. Four months later he was raking manure, perhaps, in Puente Viesgo, or piling the cobs of maize in some farm in the Pustherthal.

Not now, at all events, he committed to canvas that mocking, frustrate face, nor whittled away insensately at little chips of wood. Other sport was his now, fit for princes. Now as he heard the tap on his door and did not lift his head from the crabbed book that had engaged him these six or eight hours. . . .

"Come in, Eli," he said, "I was expecting you."

Eli entered. Curiously cocksure he seemed, inflated, for a little pale youth out of the *yeshiveh*.

"I am very much obliged to you," he said.

"You have read it?"

"Twice, three times."

"I hardly—until twenty minutes ago—expected I should see you again so soon. Have you given yourself time? Twenty minutes ago I was aware of you walking up and down at the top of the street, up and down, forward and backward, forward and backward."

"You didn't imagine I was summoning up courage to come in? Do you think I'm afraid of you? Did you think I'd be afraid of your book?"

"My book?"

"Why then did you thrust the stuff upon me?"

"A friend's purely disinterested desire that his young philosophic friend should equip himself with all the data."

"Tell me the truth this time. Let me not be mouse to your cat any more. Have you come back one of them from this last adventure of yours? Did their priests get hold of you? Where have you left them?"

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"I talked to certain priests in a place called Lourdes, a place of miracles, not many miles from the village where I kept sheep, the farm at Pierre-Fitte."

"Miracle! Pah! All their book gibbers with miracle!"

"Why should Jehovah have the privilege of miracle? Why should he not depute it to his agents? I met a family from Kravno in Whitechapel a month ago. They were as convinced that your baby finger wrought miracles in Kravno as the disciples were convinced Christ's finger wrought them in Bethlehem. And you might have been smart enough, even then. It took me years of practice."

"Miracle! Tomfoolery!"

"Scoff as much as you like at miracle in Doomington! But go careful, I warn you, at Lourdes! I heard a lawyer from Paris cackle out his mockery behind a line of paralytics waiting to be cured. An old man who'd never moved a limb for twenty years heard him and jumped from his couch. You should have seen his eyes blazing. He smote the lawyer across the mouth and filled it with teeth!"

"What is this place? Do all their conjurors and cheap-jacks gather there?"

"Many. And others beside. A little girl of the peasants maintained that she beheld a vision there of the Jewess, Mary, eighteen times. This was thirty or forty years ago, I think. The Jewess, Mary, is the woman they think of as the Mother of God."

"Blasphemy! Idolaters!"

"And in the faith of that vision, sick men and women gather at a grotto there in the hope of miracle. I saw it happen one day as I passed through the place with a drove of sheep. I saw it happen again with a woman at my side, a fancy woman of mine from Bordeaux.

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She fell to the ground whimpering and must have crawled away from me on her belly. I never saw her again."

"You accept the whole mummery of miracle?"

"That is irrelevant. If I saw a fakir climb his serpent, I should report that to you also. In such a case, we would both recognize the greater likelihood of trickery, or at least of vulgar trickery. The susceptible observer will find himself more impressed, the sceptic more puzzled, at Lourdes than at Benares. One thing is certain. The illustrious faith we were born into seems to have suspended its accredited thaumaturgisms nearly three thousand years ago. Christianity——"

"There is no moment in the tragic tale of our persistence which is not itself a miracle!"

"If you were as skilful a humorist as you are a debater what a companion you'd be for a walk in the country! I am not out to win you to a point of view. I am merely stating dispassionate facts. Here is a living faith, the faith of Lourdes and Rome, which still has influence enough with the Authorities to induce them to reverse the laws of nature. I admit the whole business is a vulgarisation of the earlier tradition. We don't get the ocean split like a cherry cake or the sun arrested on his journey. We can't even aspire to a charitable reduplication of the loaves and fishes. But there's lots of hope for lockjaw and cancer of the breast. Confess that attested miracle is an a priori argument in their favour. Did you ever see sciatica cured in the shadow of the Ark? Look out, Eli, look out! Wait till *your* special little miracle. . . ."

"They seized you then. You are Christ's man."

"Neither Christ's man nor Lucifer's."

"Christ's man or God's. There is no other division."

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"Let us put modern miracle aside then and any corroboration that may lend. I gather that your reading of the New Testament did not so much impress you as it impressed certain of your predecessors in the *yeshivehs* of Antioch and Alexandria."

"I cannot think that any competently trained rabbinic intelligence of the last few centuries could be so easily imposed on. The rabbinic philosophy has grown stronger and subtler with the lapse of time. Their own case has remained fixed in its invalidity. Let me bring back to your notice, for instance, the Epistle to the Hebrews. If any mediæval rabbi had ventured so weak a case (for it is more than an epistle, it is a disputation), a case so undocumented, so full of feeble analogy and false inference, he would have been laughed out of the synagogue and twitted into oblivion."

"Still scrabbling, Eli, on your cliff-edge path? Still no temptation to leave the miserable safety of the mind and trust to the soul's chance?"

"What chance?"

"Accept Christ not impostor, not self-gulled, not the fabrication of his friends, for just five minutes. Accept him the Son of God. What follows?"

"Can you tell me?"

"I can't."

"Why do you not try?"

"I live in Limbo, outcast from Hell and Heaven."

"Why do you persist there?"

"Eli, Eli, if you knew how much more amusing it was. . . ."

"What will you not sacrifice to your Moloch of mirth? When your father lay gasping on his death-bed. . . ."

"Quiet, you little fool, quiet! Shall I brain you?"

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Shall I wait till night comes and tip you like refuse into the river below? Or will they recognize it as a man's body if I do it in broad daylight?"

"That way you won't frighten me, Dovvid, by way of my miserable body. Why do you hound my spirit, why do you persecute me?"

"Come, come, Eli, grant that that is unfair, at least! The last time we met, do you remember the pretty names you called me—fiend, ghoul? You track me down into the one region in Doomington where even the chance of making an extra sixpence overtime will not keep our brethren from Begley Hill a minute after the whistle's gone. You find me harmlessly engaged upon the nightmares of the Physiologus, mildly wondering why the Almighty has not the good taste to imitate the order of bestial nature so humorously contrived for Him all the way down from Tatian and Origen to Philippe de Thaun—a foreigner like ourselves in this distinguished country. Conceive your excitement, Eli, when next you went cruising beyond Hawaii and, landing upon an island, found it was in truth an aspidochelone. Conceive the agreeable world it would be if the Lord suspended the creation of the owl, the night hawk, and the cuckoo, the little owl, the great owl, and the swan, the pelican, the gier eagle, and the cormorant—such dull creatures that He thought them not worth the eating and expressly urged us to refrain from so doing—conceive the whirring of wings in the heavens, the scuffling and shrieking, if they were full of the flight of the hoopoe, the phoenix, the charadrius, that prophetic curlew from the cleft mountains that is wiser than all the doctors. . . .

"Eli, what is it? You bring it on yourself, this gentle, semi-scholarly persiflage. Why are you so pale? Why

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are you wringing your hands as if to-day were the Ninth of Ab and the Temple this very day was destroyed? Why do you beat your breast, Eli?"

"On the Ninth of Ab the first Temple was destroyed, the second was also. Are they all destroyed for me this day, for ever and for ever, all the temples of my race that were built and pulled down, that shall be built and shall not be pulled down?"

"Whither have you sent me, Dovvid, into what wilderness?"

"I that should kiss your feet, Dovvid, why should I rather plant a knife at your heart?"

"You are ill, and just a little mad, my friend. You've been reading too hard, lately. You should have taken Paul, for instance, more temperately. You can't gobble him in a week-end."

"Suppose it is all true, Dovvid. God knows it isn't true. What happens to Leah? Such an infant she is, for all her grown-up way of managing us. Like a big, solemn baby with her wig, playing at being a woman. Did you forget my small son, Dovvid, when you came into my life again? . . . God, O my God, which are you, demon of death or angel of morning?"

"Say for your own part you know it's all false. Will you? Will you?"

"There is no true or false in Limbo, Eli. That is Limbo."

"What is to become of us?"

"Oh, there will be much for you to do."

"What do you mean?"

"You begin to tire me. You're too insistent. Dry your eyes, man. You sicken me."

"I know, I know. Such stupidity it all is. I'll get

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back to the *Moreh Nebuchim*, the Guide to the Perplexed, that my perplexity also may not last long. I'll get back to the old men in the synagogue chanting the Mishna by candle-light, to the good smell of whiskey and salt herring. I'll expound the Torah to them more wisely than they have heard it before. I'll be in Kravno again before the flaming roof-beams fell in on us. I'll be out with Leah in the pine-woods telling her parables from Rabbi Akiba. We heard the doves in the high tops and saw the white flick of rabbits' tails. Let us be, Dovvid, let us be as we are."

"Get out, my friend, get out. Go and glut yourself till you burst on salt herring. Leave me to my phœnixes and salamanders. What, don't you know how to take your leave yet from a man who's sick of you? What are you standing there for?"

Many minutes Eli stood there motionless in the threshold, his mouth half-open as if he had desired to speak. Such a forlornness lay upon his face that you might think not only had that desire ebbed from him, but the desire to breathe, to be. Strange, beyond all utterance, strange, that now having found what he had all these years sought, he felt only the tomb encompass him.

Eerily from minute to minute page added itself to grotesque page in the book Dovvid Pollock sat reading so absorbedly. "So doth the ichneumon clothe itself with mud that the unaware dragon may be slain, even as the enhydris entereth the crocodile's mouth. . . .

"Get out, little Christ-boy, or I'll strangle you!"

CHAPTER FOUR

Now at last, Leah recognized joyfully, Doomington was beginning to pay Eli something like his due. Leah had her little vanities. She could not disguise from herself the pleasure it gave her to see the women nudge each other in the grocery shop when she came in to make a purchase. "That's the wife of Reb Eli," they were saying, "the young *gaon*, the Talmud scholar. They say he could hide in his trouser pocket everything that Rabbi Asher and Rabbi Pinchas and all the other rabbis put together can teach you. So *frum*, too, it's like at home in Russia. God only should give him long years in the land."

There was all the social difference in the world between the closed end of Jilk Street and the open end, which partook of the superior nature of Petley Street, from which Jilk Street ran at right angles. It was, to be precise, the social difference between Leah's little parlour-shop that sold *ingber* and depended on the play-time farthings of Ealing Street School and Mrs. Levitsky's smoked salmon-and-delicatessen stores which had even been known to make up railway orders for Olympian Jews residing in Stockport and Blackpool. When Mrs. Levitsky and her quintuple row of tooth-like yellow pearls called upon Leah one Friday evening and nibbled at some of her home-made pastry, it was almost too dizzy an acknowledgment of Eli's talmudic eminence. Polite formalities being exchanged, the object of Mrs. Levitsky's

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call was seen to have some sort of juridical basis. Her daughter, Rosie, had been for two years courted by Mr. Abram Ginsberg, a master-tailor, and during that period had received a number of expensive presents. Mr. Ginsberg had lately been prostrated by a stroke, and his mental powers being for the time in abeyance, neither Mrs. Levitsky nor the Ginsberg family thought a continuance of the engagement desirable. The question at issue was this—the engagement-ring being restored, of course, without discussion—was it incumbent upon Miss Levitsky to restore his remaining presents also to their donor or had she not a moral right to retain them? The question did not lie in the precise significance of the word “present.” It was a more philosophic matter. It was true that if the presents were not restored and Mr. Ginsberg should at any time recover his mental health completely, being in possession of no amatory stock-in-trade he would be badly handicapped in the prosecution of another affair. On the other hand, should the presents be restored—and Mrs. Levitsky presented this aspect of the case at once firmly yet without vulgar heat—was it not evident that two years of Miss Levitsky’s life, those especial years associated with the receipt of delicate compliments to a young lady’s sex and appearance, was it not evident that these two years must be considered completely stultified? There would not be wanting harsh critics who would to some slight extent connect Miss Levitsky with Mr. Ginsberg’s regrettable paralytic stroke. In that case the retention of the presents was the more imperative as an insurance against any fall in the Miss Ginsberg quotations. . . .

Mrs. Levitsky concluded rightly that not only the Talmud itself took pre-cognizance of such a situation

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but that Eli would interpret it with as much justice and generosity as any laborious conclave of rabbis and arbitrators to whom it might normally have been submitted. This was not the first compliment of this nature paid to Eli, nor the last. Leah could perceive it embarrassed him, but she was of the opinion that no harm was done in the bestowal upon Eli of a fraction of the recognition due to him.

Eli had never actually received the *smichah*, the certificate of rabbinic qualification, entitling him to those final hieratic judgments as delivered by the established rabbis. Now and again these days he came back from the synagogue reporting awkwardly that one worthy and another had been suggesting that the time was ripe for him to seal his position with the *smichah*. New associations of immigrants into little sequestered synagogues were being formed—new *chevrahs* they called themselves. Eli would be able to give up carpentering if he seized his opportunity and might shortly occupy the seat of one of these new *chevrahs* as its rabbi. Later he might come over to the *Ukrainer Chevrah*, which he had attended from the beginning, for old Rabbi Pinchas could not continue quite indefinitely. Later still, perhaps, the big synagogues on the Begley Hill Road . . . perhaps some day, the call to London would summon him to the supreme chair itself, the Chief Rabbinate. . . .

Leah's mind had far outrun the scope of those casual invitations on the part of odd greybeards in the synagogue. Nevertheless, their solicitations grew in strength. The old men came over to Jilk Street occasionally and broached the subject to her. She held her hand to her heart. She blushed with pleasure.

"There is time yet, time yet," she would say, loyally

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echoing Eli's words. "The Torah is deep as the ocean, no? Has my man drained it?"

The old men beamed. Such a wife should be an example to all Israel! But inwardly she said: "Soon, soon, my Eli! God cannot delay the time long now!"

So too, but with a different inflection, the heart of Eli tolled, "Soon, soon! God cannot delay the time long now! Delay it, God, delay it, a hundred, a thousand years!"

There had never been any mitigation of the punctiliousness of Eli's Judaism. At no period could anybody have pointed out a single Jew in Doomington of whom it could be said he was more correct and laborious in his piety than Eli. If ever the ghost of an idea presented itself to Eli that this prayer or this duty might be omitted or curtailed—so intricate a thread of philosophic argument was he pursuing and so difficult it might be to resume it again—the thought of the pain, the stupefaction even, which such a proceeding would involve for Leah, was more than enough to lay the ghost. What if Leah were serving a customer or buying in, what if he himself were in the synagogue: how could Leah possibly guess that something had been omitted or curtailed? The very thought of such a betrayal, should it occur to him, would have made him sick with self-disgust.

But all this is folly. How should such a thought occur to him? How should he be consciously aware that all these years all this infinite and eternal reduplication of prayers, all the enormous unquestioned complex of obedience had been a mere mechanical function? If ever in a moment of morbidity he had reproached himself that the whole of his spirit became alive only when prayers and obediences were ended and he turned to the prosecu-

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tion of his studies, he would have received all the consolation he needed in the pages of the Shulchan Aruch, that great codex of Jewish law. "The study of Torah," it was written, "is regarded as equal to fulfilling all the commands." Or again, "When a man is judged in the divine judgment, he is judged first according to the manner in which he has devoted himself to the study of the Torah, and afterwards he is judged according to his acts."

He needed no such consolation. No man could point out that he had neglected a jot of his pious duties. But it could not be doubted—not even Leah could doubt it—that a change had lately come into the manner of Eli's fulfilment of them. How to define it? He threw himself into them with a fervour more typical of the *chassidim* than of the more scholarly Jews of his own tradition. He chanted the prayers more vigorously than even Leah remembered. A listener schooled in the niceties of tone might have detected now a certain urgency of defiance, now a certain agony of despair. He might have heard a formula valiantly and again valiantly reiterated, till of a moment it seemed that the efficacy of the formula had come to naught on the tongue, like a rotted hazel-nut. Then followed the beating of the bosom, the hands helplessly clapped together as if thus they might evoke a rock to stand firm on, ere the swirling waters tempested him away towards that other rock, that other rock whose security was so much more fearful to him than any shipwreck, the rock of Christ.

Days would come when he seemed less involved in currents so impetuous; the whole conflict was withdrawn behind the dark, abstracted eyes and pale brows. These days he spent entirely at home saving for the three absences in the synagogue for the three daily services.

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He did not settle down among the old men with the huge, yellow volumes before him, expounding the law, expounding it with so strange a violence that they shook their grey ear-locks and were half afraid. He sat down in the kitchen in Jilk Street and savoured the odour of his home; Leah preparing the *ingber* or melting the sugar for the apples to be dipped in it. Or Leah sitting by his side, cooling, soothing his hard, hot hands that had been so soft once when they turned the sacred pages in Kravno, in the *yeshiveh*. And Reuben, his small son, with the jaded white hen against his bosom, the hen that lived in the coop under the sink and had survived the mortal threat of so many Sabbath dinners. Why this hen more than any other hen in the world? Why did Reuben carry down all its predecessors and successors with such indifference to the slaughterers, hear their last glutinous screams as they fluttered and wallowed in their long, manger-like boxes while the gutter bore away their blood? What affinity had the child found of a sudden between the sooty creature and himself that he talked to it for fifteen minutes—a condition of prolixity entirely unknown hitherto in the annals of Reuben? And henceforth the creature must be lifted to his bosom morning and night, when he rose out of bed and before he returned to it. What did this portend? Or had it no meaning? A blind, disrelated whim?

Inscrutable child, whither, whither goest thou? Shall I be at thy side for long? If I dare the dark places, because they are so supernally bright so much the darker for me, wilt thou take my hand and go with me? She also, the lovely one, thy little mother, will she come also?

Back, demon, back! Leave me to my sweet twilight! Leah, my dove, my frail one, and my child, Reuben!

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Nor were books allowed to interpose themselves between them and him these evenings. He seemed, in fact, to have suspended of late his reading of outlandish volumes in English and German, even those to be deemed more tolerable as written by Jews. Like Spinoza. Leah could not conceal from herself that she was glad of it. Surely there was enough for one head a few inches big each way in the enormous tomes of Mishna and Talmud? It meant also that Dovvid Pollock did not need to come from time to time with some new writer under his arm to set Eli wrinkling his forehead and robbing himself of sleep. There was no explaining why, but she was not happy when Dovvid Pollock came. Apart from the fact that he still, and still almost pointedly, refrained from talking Yiddish, his behaviour was unexceptionable. To him at least it never occurred to remove his hat in a Jewish household. Whenever he accepted a drink of tea and a bit of cake (if there was such a thing in the house) he recited his blessing as clearly as a bell. What then? Oh, it was not her business to argue out these things. She was not happy when he came, not completely happy. That is a reason, yes? Enough! She would go dancing with him on weddings, she muttered ironically . . . She allowed her head to rest on Eli's shoulder.

"How goes it with thee, Eli?" she asked, somewhat coyly for her.

Why, O why should he suddenly bend and cover her cheeks with kisses? Why should he suddenly press her so close that she must have cried out if her lips were free? Why should he suddenly do these things?

And why should he not?

CHAPTER FIVE

I

WOLSEY AVENUE swept round in a fine crescent towards Doomington Road and the river. It was situated on the border of the town that thinned out into the north-western moors. Not for the first time that morning Eli, hoping that somewhere in the freer air light might be granted him or, more mercifully, abstracted from him completely, bent his steps hither. Light was not to be denied him.

Mrs. Travers of Oakdene, Honorary Treasurer to the All Saints' Anglo-Catholic Women's Mission, needed as a rule no vigorous persuasion to discourse on any subject that might interest her sister-missioners. She was a kindly well-to-do widow who spent her days in close association with other kindly well-to-do widows engaged upon the conversion of the Jews in Doomington by the indirect methods of nursing their sick and ministering to their poor, in so far as the efficient and jealous Jewish societies allowed them any scope for these activities. Other missions might preoccupy themselves with black men, yellow men, creatures who were almost hypothetical abstractions. You had merely to walk along Begley Hill Road and turn down into Green Bower to know how much more imperative work lay to hand. The Mission had been established eight years and had a total of three conversions to its

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credit, not wholly satisfactory ones. The first convert was at that moment serving a term of years in Doomington gaol; the two others, a brother and a sister, were of such feeble mentality that the most enthusiastic ladies in the Mission could not convince themselves that their defection dangerously shook the stubborn fortress of Jewry.

And then this young Jew, Eli . . . a young rabbi, it was gathered . . . it could not fail to have the most violent repercussion throughout Begley Hill and Longton, all the way down to the comfortable southern suburbs. Indeed it did not fail of its repercussion.

"The Hand of God," that was about as much as you could get out of Mrs. Travers. It was at least a curious coincidence. When she stepped out of Oakdene that Friday morning, closing the garden-gate behind her with one hand and holding tightly with the other on to her silver net-bag with its list of names and addresses and small subscriptions, she was in fact on her way to All Saints, a church in the Blenheim Road, on the fringe of Begley Hill, to attend the second monthly meeting of the Mission for the conversion of all the Elis in Doomington. She did not further signalize the day as the eighth on which the workers of the Victoria Cabinet Works were locked out because of some contumacious demand for a halfpenny per hour rise in wages. Nor did the crushed pale creature whose ribs had been pressed into his lungs three or four minutes ago by the wheel of the huge dray that had no business at all to be driving through a residential thoroughfare like Wolsey Avenue, neither did he any longer concern himself with strikes and wages, as he lay bleeding there in the roadway.

Mrs. Travers knew the symptoms, for her missionary labours had resolved themselves almost entirely into nurs-

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ing. She knew the meaning of that gush of blood from the mouth, those sharp breaths, that deadly swoon.

"Quick!" she cried to the drayman imperiously. The small crowd that had gathered parted as she stooped down to the man's heart. "Quick, tear off that boarding from the back of your cart!"

The drayman was green with fright. "I 'ollered to 'im, mam, to get out o' t'road," he explained, his eyes starting from his head. "An' I thought 'e 'eered too. All mazed 'e was like. Next think I know t'wheel's bumpin' . . . summat soft, like a sack. "Christ!" I said. . . ."

Mrs. Travers turned away from him impatiently.

"Will somebody pull that boarding off its hinges!" she commanded. Two stalwart youths obeyed her. "You run for a doctor! The rest of you lift him as carefully as you can on to this board! No, no, more gently! Don't touch him at all on that side! By the shoulders and the thighs, so! Take him into my house—Oakdene, there, the next but one. I'll go and get the door opened. Don't rock him, men! Get out of step! So!"

"The Hand of God" . . . Mrs. Travers on her way down to All Saints, her mind full of the affairs of the Mission to the Doomington Jews, and the young Jew, Eli, crushed almost to death at her doorstep. It was not right to say "young Jew" exactly nor by any means "young Christian." Yet something had been done, some ground had been covered. It was not exclusively the miracle. . . .

That was the point, the miracle. . . . That was why the ladies at All Saints regretted so keenly that Mrs. Travers did not show herself the affable, talkative Mrs. Travers they knew her for. She would talk if you pressed her. But you didn't feel yourself quite justified in do-

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ing that. She had, of course, told all she knew to Father Carter and Father Hastings, and that's where the matter lay.

Excepting, of course, for the young man's astonishing career among the Doomington Jews. Rumours came through to All Saints; but the authorities there felt almost from the beginning they could have no formal connection with him . . . his extraordinary methods.

The miracle . . . all vague it was and blurred. Mrs. Travers would certainly never have anticipated that if her own solid, comfortable Doomington house should some day be elected by inscrutable God to be the scene of . . . oh! a miracle, what else could you call it? . . . she should find herself so tongue-tied about it all. Of course the young man had not specifically told her, nor had he any the more attempted to conceal anything from her. But she had mainly been left to learn what she could from the poor lad's lips (after all, he was only a boy) at night, when he lay straining against his bandages, sweating in his weakness, moaning . . . till suddenly the light of the recollection flooded his eyes and once more he saw . . . once more the miracle enacted itself, vouchsafed to a humble little carpenter in Doomington.

How could she ask him to say more fully what had happened that sixth day after his coming into her house? It was the sixth day and at six in the early evening. She had come in not many minutes after. His eyes were still large with the vision terrible and splendid. His ears still strained for the voice, the voice. What else was there for her to do than to wait if peradventure she should choose to tell her what had been?

Something she had learned. Much there was she hardly dared desire to learn. But that was not wholly

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why she could not bring herself to make the thing a tea-table topic among her sister-missioners. She had some inkling of the bliss that sometimes made the young man as difficult of speech as he had been that first day, when he had opened his eyes again in the cool grey room at Oakdene. She sometimes saw him as speechless with bliss as he had then been with pain. But she had an inkling of that other pain, not of the body, which had thrust itself like swords into him when it became clearer and ever clearer what path he must henceforth tread.

There was still something more that kept her aloof about it all and silent, however much she tried to escape the thought, the reproach, the anguish. It was not less than anguish, the recollection of that young, distraught Jewess, the wife of the convert. Her name was Leah.

It was not more than a day or two after Eli had left Oakdene. When they told her that the late invalid's wife wished to see her, she had felt some discomfort about it. After all she had behaved as any decent woman would behave who had the means and a house with space enough. It was out of the question to allow him to be taken off to hospital those early days with the lungs abraded and the pleural membrane seriously injured. The doctor himself had said that removal at this stage might endanger the man's life; it could hardly fail to add a month or two or three to the duration of his illness. When he had turned the corner, it seemed foolish not to allow him to get on with his convalescence there. The man had had no right to insist on going so soon, the fifth week after the accident. The strap-bandages had been removed only four days before.

Mrs. Travers had had experience enough of the poorer class of Jewish women, how voluble they were. How-

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ever, the poor creature must have had an anxious time of it these five weeks. Well, it would soon be over, the torrent of thanks, the weeping.

It was not the young woman's reproaches, her shrill taunts, that Mrs. Travers remembered. These had their day soon. But when the poor girl lay crumpled at her feet, her fingers clutching piteously at the air, and no sound issued from her save a sort of hurt blind, moaning like an animal whose eyes have been dragged from their sockets to gratify some fiend's whimsy—then she seemed more grievous a sight than her husband crushed in the roadway, with the blood spurting from his mouth.

"How strange," she thought, "how strange"—even at that moment it seemed stranger that her mind should have room to think it—"how strange that so lovely a girl as this (look at her eyelashes) should have shorn her hair to put on this hideous wig? Poor little hurt girl! Christ take you also, my darling, into his keeping!"

But the girl did not weep, did not once weep, even upon that evening when he told her what had befallen, and she was white as snow by moonlight. Never, never till the ending of her days did Leah, the wife of Eli, weep again.

II

He could not wholly suppress the philosophic quality of his mind, not wholly, though the mind that survived seemed battered under the appalling collapse of body. He could not help wondering how mind remained conscious of its separateness or returned to that consciousness when the frame that housed it endured such pain. Slowly, but with infinite labour, for each mental movement seemed accompanied by a harsh, swift breath which

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was like the closing in of the lungs upon a saw, slowly his mind adjusted itself to further consciousness. He became aware of the tall grey walls and the grey, cool curtains before the window, then of the many pillows propped behind him, behind the precise point where the ruin had its fierce focus. Then he became aware that never had there been so large a room as this in the world or so large a bed. Where was he? What had happened? Where was Leah?

A woman stood beside him, her features barely visible in the mild light of a lamp some yards away.

"Madam," he said. But his throat and tongue had lost their use. The noise seemed as little as the rubbing together of leaves. O the saw, the teeth of the saw in the lungs!

"Hush!" she said, "hush! All will be well with you. You must not speak. I found your union card in your pocket and have sent to the address on it. Only just nod your head if you wish to say 'Yes.' You have a wife there?"

Yes.

"She will come before long. She will understand that the best will be done for you. You must not worry. If your illness will cause any difficulty at home, that will be seen to. I am talking too much to you. The doctor can't be very long now."

"It hurts. . . ."

"Poor lad, poor lad. Yes. He will do something to relieve you. Soon, soon, quiet, soon!"

He felt her place a little ice in his mouth, beyond his blue lips, a thin film of ice. Yes, she must be thinking these are seconds, seconds, tolling away on that high clock in the corner. Years, years, divisions of time each

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more enormous than time, and all of them confused and confounded with each other into one moment of unplumbed pain. The doctor did not come, he would never come. Where was Leah, why did she delay, she would be so terrified when they told her. No, Leah, it is not so dreadful as they are pretending. It will be over soon. She said the doctor can't be very long now. He will do something to relieve me. Who is she? She has a low voice. It is not so dreadful as they say, child, do not fear for me.

Should I have to tell you, Leah, that I have gone to Christ . . . Leah, Leah, my little dove, will that not be more terrible for you? . . . soon, soon upon this side or upon that side, there cannot be much delaying.

O God, how merciful thou art. There can be no thinking now. Thou hast put an end to thinking. How shall the mind still labour with a saw sawing through the bones?

I will declare the decree, sang David. The Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.

Why dost thou sing in riddles, thou who singest? Make the dark word plain, singer of Israel.

I saw in the night visions, and behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven. . . .

There can be no thinking now, with a saw sawing through the bones . . . not now, not ever. Let there be an end to it.

And when the sun was darkened that day and the veil of the Temple was rent in the midst, did the moments seem even as years, as to me now?

This ice upon my tongue, kind, kind lady. . . .

And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge,

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and filled it with vinegar and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink. . . .

Thou? Leah? My dove, be not afraid. No, kind lady, I will not move. I will not excite myself. I know well how frightened thou art and how brave a courage thou puttest on, little Leah.

"Eli, thou must lie very still, beloved. It will heal soon, she says. A few weeks, at most. I may not stay more than a few moments now. But to-morrow a few moments more and the morrow after a few moments more. When thou art fit, I shall bring thee *meichelach*, little things to eat cooked flimsy as vapour. She will let me, yes? She thinks thou shalt stay here. It will be better for thee than in the hospital. She is a widow and her son died in a foreign land. A young chicken I shall buy like for any prince.

"She says she hears a ring at the door. The doctor. I shall go now. To-morrow . . . no, do not speak, do not move. Ah, that it had been me, my jewel. On thy brow, so. It will be well with the child. Fear not. God be at thy side."

On my brow, lips like silk, like petals. Sweet child, well I know thy heart breaks. It will be well soon.

What, Leah, what is it, my child? Why, as thou turnest once more to flutter a last breath to me, why do thine eyes grow wild with horror? What is it that hath arrested them on their way to me, to my own eyes? What? Something on the wall yonder, in the niche opposite my bed? A shining of pale ivory, Leah. It is a cross! Nor had I seen it before! I adjure thee by God I had not seen it before! And Christ hanging upon the cross, his head on his shoulders! There are nails in his hands and in his feet! There is a wound in his thigh! Leah, Leah,

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I did not place it there! How should I, I that am so weak, so full of pain? Would God I were dead, Leah, would God I were dead!

III

That strange state of suspension which followed the injection of morphia . . . the pain ached and ebbed, ached and ebbed, then became dull, tolerable. But why hung he so suspended, his body strapped tight above and below his injuries like an Egyptian mummy in its wrappings, why hung he so suspended between ceiling and floor? What did it portend? Now he seemed like a tree hacked from its roots, now like a tree whose branches were lost in congealed gloom. Who desired him? None in the world? Was he homeless henceforth, a wanderer? A thousand times more hopelessly adrift than all his drifting race, bound to each other by a million tendrils spreading over all the lands, deep-rooted in a millennial pride and glory and shame. When they had hounded him out into the wilderness, would they open out their arms to him, the others? The priest muttering secrets in the pine-wood with the smell of blood already in his beard and the smoke from burned homesteads already black in the hollow of his eyes? He also? Must he be his brother now? Sergei, his brother?

Was this what it portended, this suspension between ceiling and floor? Was there no struggling back again to his bed despite all its woe? Was he doomed to lie stretched out here for ever along the homeless, middle air?

At last his exhaustion and the drug were too much for him. He lay propped upon his pillows sleeping

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heavily, his lips dead blue, his face yellow as the ivory cross in the niche over against his bed.

"He'll be all right now for a few hours. On no account must he move the fraction of an inch. Yes, I'll have a nurse sent round at once. It's not my business of course, Mrs. Travers, but it's uncommonly good of you to insist on keeping him like this, though it's difficult to see that anything else could have been done with safety. Of course you start off with the weakest fluid diet, the usual thing, then gradually strengthen up to fish and white meat, and so on. What's that? His wife?"

"I gather they're very orthodox people. I think I said he's a Jew, a working-man from the Begley Hill district?"

"O yes, he's a Jew right enough. Curiously refined sort of face for a Jew. Yet an accident like this is often enough to make a bargee look like a fairy prince. Yes?"

"The poor woman seemed very apprehensive about the food he was going to get. Not kosher you know, not kosher. When he got on to something more substantial, she begged with tears in her eyes, could she be allowed to bring up his food for him; chicken, she said, and little things she knew he liked. You have no idea, Doctor Humphries, how much importance these poorer Jews attach to kosher, even in cases of danger like this. She seemed to be taking it so much to heart that I almost felt I might——"

"Tush and nonsense, Mrs. Travers, tush and nonsense. I'll have him packed off to hospital if there's any monkeying about with his diet. Sorry to make myself so plain, but I can trust *you*, and I'm going to trust nobody else. That's clear?"

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"You can rely on me. Thank you. We'll be seeing you to-morrow then?"

"Yes, about ten. Good-night, Mrs. Travers."

"Good-night, Doctor Humphries."

The next embarrassing request came from the patient himself. Embarrassing was hardly the word for it. How could you, on the one hand, deny it, when the poor man enunciated it with the greatest difficulty, blood thickening in his throat? How could you, on the other hand, gratify it when by so doing you were nullifying the very work you and your friends at All Saints had been so laboriously and expensively prosecuting for so many years?

What would Father Carter and Father Hastings have recommended?

She heard him cough again, saw the sweat gather on his brow with the pain of it. She saw him look at her piteously like a dog. After all, for the present the matter was in the hands of Doctor Humphries.

". . . before my wife comes. For myself I do not care. But my wife, she is not very broad-minded. . . ."

So Mrs. Travers rose from the chair beside his bed, went over and drew the heavy black velvet curtain across the niche where Christ hung upon his ivory cross.

It was thither that Leah's eyes turned the moment she entered the room that evening, even before she sought out Eli's eyes. They rested full upon him, shining. "I thank thee," they said. "I thank rather the kind lady. How kind a lady she is although she is only a Christian!" Then her lips said: "How goes it with thee, birdkin? How is the pain?"

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"Less, less. It is not hard to bear."

"The Above One be thanked! To-morrow I may bring Reuben. She asks: "He is no noisy child? He will not disturb our sick one?" I say—I just manage to say it and she to understand it—I say: "Would that our Reuben, if only a little, were a noisy child! He is too quiet. He sits like a log thinking of nothing all day!" She smiles. She has a smile you might almost say a Jewish one."

"She is a kind lady like our own mothers."

"Hush! Not yet must thou talk! To-morrow and the day after will also be a day. Alas, one thing only! She tells me that the doctor says it will be dangerous if I bring thee little *meichelach* from home. . . . I must not bring them for two weeks or three. It says in the Torah, does it not, that a sick man may eat even upon a fast? Is it not written also that a man may eat—how shall I say it, Eli?—what is not proper, not clean, when he is very sick? I say this to thee that thou mayst take heart, beloved. Thou must eat what is given thee and get well, and when thou comest home it shall be what thy heart desires—*varrennikas* in the fat of fowls, eh, and . . . yes, yes, yes, thou shalt have thy broad beans."

Lying little maiden, he knew how bravely she lied. He knew how both her pride and piety were hurt that they refused to gratify her. She had more confidence in the work of her own kosher fingers, working in the way the Law enjoined, than in the labours of the most fastidious and costly sick-room kitchen in Europe. Indeed, had he not himself the same confidence?

"It is time to go now, beloved. To-morrow then. Thy son also."

Reuben came with her on the morrow. He was dumb

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with misery to see his father in such pain. The coughing of blood had ceased now, the breathing was a little easier. But the face was still desperately haggard. For many minutes the child said nothing; he merely looked wretchedly into his father's face. Then they were aware he was speaking.

"It was very bad of God to throw my father under the cart and make him be so ill. He is a bad God and I don't like him!"

"Reuben!" cried Leah in horror.

"My child, my child!" whispered Eli. The young heresiarch!

"Well I *don't* love him!" said Reuben defiantly.

This was no time nor place for severity. Besides, she felt it too acutely, too fearfully. Anything might happen, the room might fall in upon them in smoke and lightning. "How canst thou say such a thing, Reuben?" she wailed, her eyes brimmed with tears.

The child perceived them. "When he makes my father well again," he said hopefully, "I'll like him again!"

Eli smiled faintly. "Do not perturb thyself, Leah. A child remains a child!"

But when they were gone, when Mrs. Travers or the nurse sat dozing lightly in her chair, the wavering tourney was held again in the forlorn field, wavering, staggering, drawing together its ranks into new dispositions. It was not his body now that hung suspended, but his spirit, hung between apocalyptic and fulfilment, torn between Sinai and Calvary. The end and the beginning of his tribulation were close at hand.

It was the sixth day since his coming into the house of the Christian woman. She herself had been called

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away for an hour or two and the nurse had descended into the lower part of the house to give certain directions. At that moment the blood seemed to lie dormant in the veins of the sick man as the thick cloud that had descended three days ago lay dormant upon Doomington. The functions of blowing wind and growing grass were remitted and all his functions of thought. When the faint light first blew, first trembled, in the shadowy space beyond the foot of his bed, so faint it was it seemed to him rather a modification of the darkness within his brain than a condition actually palpable to his eyes. It seemed merely the beginning of a thought, the precursor of renewed combat. Then he was aware that the light sprayed outwards away, disrelated from him. It was like the spraying of a fountain impelled obliquely by a wind. The light played upon the folds of the black velvet curtain drawn across the niche. For a time it seemed to course along the folds and meet its own scattered rays upon their round ridges, then break apart again.

Then he was aware that the texture seemed to thin away within the inquisition of this light, to become permeable to it, translucent as gossamer. The arched space that had been for six days shut off by the opaque curtain was now illuminated and manifest. Never in his life before had anything been so clear to him as the ivory cross that hung there and the Christ nailed upon the cross. Not the Dnieper shining broadly the length of the day when all the townsfolk of Kravno stood upon its bank to cast their sins into the silver water; not his mother gazing with joy and awe upon him on the day of his *bar-mitzvah* when the sixty-year-old wise-acres engaged him in argument and they faltered and

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fell before him; not Leah in her kitchen in Jilk Street shaking the black pots or when he entered lifting her head with the glad cry of a creature in the spring-time meadows. None of these things had he ever seen so clear, it seemed to him, so true, as the cross and Christ on the cross. Nor might any of them, the dearest of them, intolerably dear, lovely, lovely sombre maiden, nor might she ever again be visible with this truth, this clarity. There was no other truth than he, crucified and bleeding. The light was the light of apocalypse, which was not of the sun nor of any star, the light of Calvary, when the veil of the Temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake and rocks were rent.

Bleeding, bleeding. Slowly the blood oozed from the pale flesh where the nails had pierced it, the manifest and mortal blood. So tiredly the head dropped upon its shoulders as if the crown of thorns were heavier than all the compact mountain-ranges and the oceans gathered together.

And then at length the eyelids fluttered and came back from over the eyes. And then the eyes turned and came to rest on the eyes of the sick carpenter, pale unto death with woe and bliss, in his bed in the dark city of Doomington. Jew unto Jew, Doomington and Calvary. In those eyes, the eyes of the Jew upon the cross, the elder brother by a year he might have seemed to the Jew bound in his bed—there at last was the exposition, the meaning, there was all lucidity.

Now nothing was hidden from the student that had stood in his own light so long. Now he knew that Christ was the knowledge he had so long sought by such devious paths, fleeing further from it the nearer he had attained it; thrusting his blind path through the burrows of in-

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tellest, when Christ had been bound for a sign upon his hand, and was for frontlets between his eyes and upon his gates.

So it seemed to that pale youth, for whom the blood shed at Kravno was annulled in the blood shed on Calvary, for whom was destined contumely and the four nails and the thrust of the lance, even as that other had known them, his brother born in Bethlehem.

And verily the voice that spoke seemed such as he might have heard in his boyhood, speaking out of some dusky corner of the synagogue, such its quality and inflection were. But there were as many tears in it, it seemed to him, as all doomed men had shed and as much joy as all hearts had shaken with, put together again out of the tomb's cold dust and wild with the ecstasy of heaven.

So Christ, he deemed, spoke to him, using words lately made familiar, saying—it was almost death to hear, so exquisite the voice was: “Even thou, my brother, even thou, know thou this: thou that art Mary's son, even as I. For even as I have prayed for that other, so I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.”

Till the voice was dimmed like the sound of singing that goes a long way hence, and the eyes turned again, and the eyelids fluttered and came down, and the light became less about the cross till it was no more seen; and a thin veil like gossamer seemed to hang between, through which the light still came to and fro, but not for long. And now the gossamer thickened into substance like black velvet, and the folds fell heavily.

“Even so, Lord,” he said. “It shall be even so.”

CHAPTER SIX

THERE was only one purpose in living now That Eli clearly recognized. It was precisely the purpose to which the apostles had devoted themselves after the second going of Christ. It seemed to lighten and resolve the complexity of his pain and weakness to discover life determined in one moment into so perfect a simplicity. There was one duty he was elected to, no more, no less, and by so ineffable an election: the conversion of his brothers in Doomington.

It would be to misunderstand completely the new ordering of his mind to imagine he was under any illusion regarding the difficulty of the task to which, he considered, his elder brother and theirs, Christ born in Bethlehem, had specifically appointed him. He remembered with extreme clarity what anguish he had himself endured thrusting his naked body through the spiny thicket. He remembered how he had stumbled into obscure and matted pools and thought they must submerge him for ever. He knew how they would wag their heads as he passed among them, and spit upon him and smite him upon the head. Even as he himself would have done, was it days ago or years ago, should some one have come his way crying: I have come, O my brethren, from our brother Christ. Slay me, as he was slain, but believe on him. How cried Ezekiel, O my brethren?

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Turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?

And his wife? And his son? He closed his eyes and prayed, requesting strength to help him where it was most needed, where he was himself weakest. Perhaps even, so much grace had been vouchsafed him, it might be granted there. Could so much bliss be hoped for? Of all women in Jewry, who was made out of iron more rigid, soft though she was as a dove, though honey and milk were under her tongue and the smell of her garments was like the smell of Lebanon?

He fell musing upon her, how lovely she was. He had no other words for her than the words of the king that sang. Her teeth were like a flock of sheep that were even shorn, her lips like a thread of scarlet. Fair as the moon was she, clear as the sun, terrible as an army with banners.

That she might go forth with him, singing the Christ!

Vain, vain hope. Should the rivers return upon their sources? Should dumb stones speak?

There was none other authority now than Christ, howsoever dear they might be who would dispute it. Though his own heart might be broken and hers also, Christ's on the cross should not be broken again, yea, though a man's foes be those of his own household.

How must she know then, and when? It was the problem that most held his mind during the period of his convalescence. Mrs. Travers did not remit her kindness. He had already gathered from various slight intimations, reinforced by a power of intuition he had not seemed to possess before, what her main interest was, identically the conversion of the Jews in Doomington. He perceived that she attempted to keep it from him

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because any suspicion of attempting to proselytize an impotent guest did violence to her sense of hospitality. He had endeavoured for his own part to initiate the subject with her, but it was far more difficult than he had thought, and she had seemed to recognize the difficulty. Upon the day when through the interposed curtain Christ had become palpable to him—he could sooner have doubted that Christ had looked towards him and spoken to him than that his own heart beat—upon that day certain words had fallen from his lips and ebbed into incoherence. She had gathered their meaning. Later he had endeavoured to tell her more, as he could certainly not have done had she herself asked it from him. Then finally she suggested, with diffidence, that so soon as he felt strong enough Father Hastings of All Saints might pay him a visit. Eli might receive counsel and consolation and Father Hastings would be in the last degree interested and delighted.

She perceived at once the mistake she had made. He looked at her so wildly, shuddered with such violence, that she feared she had seriously compromised his recovery. Any such suggestion did not once more pass her lips. Most scrupulously the black curtain was kept drawn across the niche, as much for Eli's sake still, as for his wife's, who came over to see him as often as the doctor thought desirable. Mrs. Travers was never clearly to realize that the young Jew had accepted no system of doctrine, was no Christian in any sense she and her friends and counsellors could consider valid. He had accepted solely a person; but all his body and soul were flooded with him.

For his part Eli realized he dared not prejudice what chances of success he had by any sort of premature action.

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He knew that should he, for days and weeks yet, breathe the slightest whisper to Leah of the news that must so hideously devastate her, he himself must succumb to the shock he would inflict upon her.

He must wait. He must wait. The blood must come back into his cheeks, the bruised flesh must heal and the torn membranes, the crushed bones must be set firmly again, before he might outrage far more disastrously than ever his own flesh and bones had been, the soul of the creature he loved best in all the world. Best in all the world saving one alone, whom they had crowned with thorns and given him a reed for a sceptre to hold in his right hand and had mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews!

He left Oakdene on the first day the doctor declared it might be done without danger.

"I shall not thank you," he said, kissing the hand of Mrs. Travers with a courtliness which seemed princely, curiously remote from the ghetto which had nurtured him and was taking him again. He was to find himself remoter still from the ghetto in the ghetto's vortex than if the capricious seas had tossed him upon the last island of Polynesia. "I cannot thank you. The grace of Christ will be on you."

The words plucked at her heart-strings uneasily, with a noise of foreboding. They seemed like the first notes struck out on an instrument before the chords of calamity peal and shudder upon the air till the music dies away at length in a silencing of the world.

"Write to me," she cried out to him with attempted cheerfulness, "I'll expect to see you sometimes. Any time you care to let me see you at your own home and

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your wife. . . . Don't forget those sweets for Reuben. Tell him more will follow!"

The wheels of the cab she had ordered for him died away. She had asked him should no messenger be sent to bring his wife to see him home safely. Now she understood why he had requested that his wife should not be disturbed.

She rose to the room he had just left and at length drew the curtain aside from the image of Christ. There she kneeled for she knew not how long. There also she asked forgiveness. For it had seemed to her at that moment of foreboding that all her labour and the labour of her friends was a wickedness; it had seemed that it might have been happier for the young Jew had he never been born and for that devoted doomed girl, his wife; happier had they never been born.

She prayed for forgiveness, hardly daring to hope it had been granted her.

CHAPTER SEVEN

IT was the eve of the Sabbath. Four tall brass candlesticks and a small fifth held five candles burning placidly. Leah had inherited from her mother at least the secret of the snowy washing of table-cloths. Not the yeast in the wake of a ship thrusting through wine-dark waters was whiter, nor a patch of snowdrops in the murky twilight of a yew. The fire flickered upon the hatless Moses contemplating the Tablets of the Law. It gave a glow to the mysterious glazed shoe from Brittany that hung on its pale pink ribbon. The "best bread" with grain sprinkled on its polished plaits heaved like a boulder under its white napkin. There was a bottle of sweet wine, even that, beside the brass tray where the two silver beakers shone, a tall beaker with a stem for Eli, a small squat one for Reuben. Bread and wine. . . .

. . . took bread and blessed, and brake it, and gave to them, and said, Take, eat; this is my body.

And he took the cup: and when he had given thanks he gave it to them and they all drank of it.

And he said unto them, This is my blood. . . .

She stood with a veil upon her head, circling her hands three times forward and backward across the candle-flames before her face. Then she covered her face with her hands and uttered a prayer of the Jewish woman for the eve of the Sabbath.

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A phantom in his own household, a death's head at the table. How could he, weak though he be unto death, how could he permit this treachery, to Christ, to her?

This night it must be, this night. Woe beyond all utterance. Her blood also I must drink, O Christ Lord, and her body also break.

One moment's respite, one moment more. He was intoning the *kiddush* now, the prayer over the wine that precedes the Sabbath meal, as he had intoned it for nearly thirty years. How pale he was, poor lamb, how his voice wavered. It would be her duty to make him strong, stronger than he had ever been before and to put more colour in his cheeks than there had been. She would work herself to the bone (he would not know it) to buy him eggs and fresh meat. Broad beans, indeed, a fine tale for a working-man. And there was every chance, the wife of the president of the *Ukrainer Chevrah* synagogue had told her, that they might make him a formal offer before long. He would cease to be a working-man, a common carpenter.

"For thou hast chosen," he sang with so melancholy a singing as no man had made before even in the sad heart of Doomington, "thou hast chosen us and sacrificed us above all nations. . . ."

How should they know, the blind ones, that sang so happily at this moment now with their wives beside them, resting from the week's labour, and their little lost Jewish children gathered about the white table-cloths, how should they know what choosing was that and what sanctifying? Not long now, not long. This day or the next day must their brother go forth amongst them, at Christ's own bidding, rendering the evangel.

". . . and in love and favour hast given us thy holy

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Sabbath as an inheritance. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who hallowed the Sabbath!"

And one there was who must rise up, this moment or the next moment, and desecrate it with more than the abomination of desolation. No language was devised for it. Yea, it was a bitter path to tread, though journey's end be an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits, a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon.

Now Reuben also had recited the *kiddush*, solemnly, without much expression, for so the child was made. She clapped her hands together excitedly over the feast that was now to be set before them.

"Not much of this thou must eat," she said. "It is only to give a foretaste." She produced a dish of salted herring and onion, chopped up very small. He smiled wanly. He could imagine the horror of Mrs. Travers at the spectacle of such a dish set before her invalid. Fried fish followed, crisp and golden brown.

"The very best oil," said Leah, "no better is in the shop!"

A soup came next, the colour of yellow honey. The *lockshen* in it, the vermicelli, had clotted into lumps. Indeed not. That was no error in her cooking. She knew he preferred it so. Reuben removed a small lump in his spoon and went over to the soap-box hen-coop under the sink.

"Eat, Miriam!" he commanded. Miriam the hen was a dowdy heap of feathery oblivion.

"Be content!" his mother said. "When she awakes, she will eat. Let it be there!" The boy came back immediately to his seat under the hatless Moses.

Baked potatoes now followed, and then the sacred,

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the obligatory, broad beans, cooked together with a handful of pearl barley. She had long since mastered her distaste for pearl barley. Did not Eli like his beans flavoured with them?

"Well?" asked Leah, "what thinkest thou?"

He was silent.

"But wait," she went on, "wait. Now it comes! Knowest thou what is coming now?"

He was silent.

"Thou thinkest a hen, yes? Say thou thinkest a hen?"

How could he speak when his tongue seemed furry with such a lichen as grows on corrupted trees? Each mouthful he had eaten slid slowly into his stomach like a nugget of lead.

She flung open the oven door with a peremptory gesture like a benevolent wizard. A whiff of hot air surged into the hot room. But it was more than that. A smell of roasted flesh, rarer, more pungent than the odour of hen's flesh roasted, accompanied it.

"Behold!" she cried, "*katchky*!"

Roast duck, nothing else, verily, roast duck.

"Wait, there is a story to tell!" she busied herself with knife and fork. "Here, Eli, is the stuffed neck for thee. Reuben likes the leg, yes? Reuben shall have the leg. Thou hast lived a fine day, Reuben, to see roast *katchky* on thy father's table! Not the last either, Reuben, do not disturb thyself! It is hard to separate this leg properly. I should have remembered to sharpen the knife on the slop-stone before the Sabbath. I said there was a story to tell. Knowest thou, Eli, that with the last shillings in the house—wait, there is a joyful end to this tale. Be not perturbed about the last shillings in the house, there are more. Well, it had not been a good

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week in the shop and the Union—what can you expect from the Union? And the kind lady that was tending on thee sent money, but she has done enough for this house, enough. What for a taste would the Sabbath dinner have if bought with gentile money—an unholiness! Thou wouldst like the little liver, no, Eli? I scraped the last shillings together to get a hen for thy home-coming. And then what happened? Such a year on all the enemies of Israel! It is as thy heart tells thee! Yes, the hen was not kosher. The liver was all yellow, with a needle in it. The Above One knows how a needle should get into a hen's liver. I gave it to Maggie, the fire-goyah. What to do now? Shalt thou have no hen for thy home-coming? But not a penny in the cupboard, not a penny. It seems no help for it. At last she must go, Miriam the hen, not that there would be much fat on her. Eat, Eli, eat, why dost thou not eat? It breaks my heart. I cannot bring myself to say it. It gets worse with the child. He loves Miriam better than his own mother, eh, Reuben?"

"I love father and you first. *Then* I love Miriam!"

"God first thou shouldst say. Then thy father and mother. Then what about thy grandmother, Serra Golda, and thy grandfather, Izzel Chaim, no harm befall them and their children? Then thou mayst love Miriam. Let it be, thou art a good child. It is he himself that says it, with a face pale like dough. 'Mother,' he says, 'Miriam is bound to be kosher. She has eaten only kosher food in this house. Shall I take her to the slaughterers?' What thinkest thou of that for a good child?"

"What shall I say? No? Thou shalt have no hen for thy home-coming? Shall I say yes? Then Reuben bends down to Miriam and takes her to his breast and

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talks to her. Five minutes pass. Ten minutes pass. He talks to her in a low voice. She twists her head this way, that. She ruffles up her neck-feathers. Then at last Reuben says—it is like a voice from the grave—he says: ‘Miriam herself says yes. We are going now, mamma. Give me twopence for the slaughterer.’

“There are just three or four farthings in the house. With a heart like stone I take down the broken cup where I have put them away in the corner of the cupboard. He takes them. He goes towards the door. All of a sudden there is a loud knock. What is it? The postman. A letter from Russia. It is the Above One himself coming to our help. *Mazel Tov!* Another baby for my mother, no harm befall them, a baby, a circumcision. The business has been doing brightly also. Twenty roubles. Yes, twenty, not less than twenty. A *katchky!*” Breathlessly she rattled off the last links in this amazing chain of causation as if nothing must be allowed now to withhold her from her climax.

“A *katchky!*” she repeated triumphantly. Then her eyes fell upon her husband’s plate.

“Eli!” she cried, “thou art not eating? Something is wrong with thee then? A *katchky!*” she said once more, as if there were wizardry in the mere enunciation of the word. “Why eatest thou not?”

Out of what far lands his voice came, dimmed by the interposition of mountains and the salt middle sea, and made small by the shouting of many men gathered about Golgotha, the place of a skull.

“Who knows, Leah, my child, if I shall ever eat in thy house again!”

“What is wrong, Eli, what is this thou sayest? Thou

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art not well yet! Behold like a table-cloth art thou pale! Has the pain come back again? Reuben will this moment go for Doctor Katz!"

"I need no doctor, beloved. I am healed."

"Be thou not perturbed. Much remains of the twenty roubles, God be thanked. It is as if their heart told them when money would be most useful to us. Thou rememberest the occasion before, how ill was Reuben. Reuben, get down thine overcoat!"

"Stay, child, stay. Or go, go. But no need for the doctor. How shall I know which will be happiest for thee?"

"Come then, eat, Eli my beloved. The pain has passed away yet, eh? Thou wicked one, playing with thy knife and fork whilst the pain was in thy bones and wouldst say nothing and let me tell thee tales!"

"How shalt thou understand, how shall I tell thee?"

She drew back suddenly. She stared at him, her heart contracting.

"What, does the doctor say something terrible has happened in thy inside? That it is left with thee, that thou mayst not be cured of it? It is a lie, Eli, it is a lie! We will go to other doctors, better doctors! Believe them not, my child! For the present, till we call them, let me take thee to thy bed. It will be better——"

"Leah, Leah, my heart splits. A blackness is descending upon me. Thou wilt not let me share thy bed ever again!"

"Eli, Eli, thou art mad! Thou art in fever that thine eyes stare so and thy forehead sweats!"

"Let me tell thee quickly or the blood will rise into my throat and choke me; or my throat will crack and I shall go from this day till the day I die a dumb man in

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the streets of Doomington, and I shall be unable to deliver the message that has been entrusted me, a dumb man, a tomb that riseth and walketh about by noonday."

"I listen. Say what thou hast to say to me! No, no, my beloved, say it not! It cannot be! God would not permit it! Hold thy tongue!"

"Ah, thou knowest? Perhaps a whisper has come to thee also, faint and far in the watches of midnight? Dost thou guess?"

"What is the light that shines so in thine eyes? I am afraid! Thou art mad! I am lost utterly!"

"Hath he made my way a little easier? That I may go forth into the wilderness——"

"What foolery is this?" the woman shrieked. "No more thou shalt eat my food? No more thou shalt share my bed? Thou art weary of me, I that loved thee so, that tended thee so! What woman then has come whose food thou shalt eat, whose body pleases thee more? What fiend from Gehenna has arisen——"

He wailed like a dying baby and covered his face with his hands. "How couldst thou say it? How couldst thou say it?" There were no other words for him, it seemed, from now till the ending of days. "How couldst thou say it? How couldst thou say it?"

"Eli, I have hurt thee unto death. I knew not what I was saying. Help me, God, the world falls in upon me and upon my man and upon my child! Why then, Eli, hast thou said these things? Have we not loved each other long? Hath God not blessed us? What have I done wrong that I may not do it again? It is some joke of thy sickness, Eli, that thou canst bring thyself to utter words like those. It is not thy own lips that say it. It is the evil spirit. Thou hast already forgotten

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how he twisted thy lips to make them say what terrible things. Say it is so, Eli, my beloved!"

His words were cold and even, like ice that has congealed a stream that ran. "It was no evil spirit said these things, it was none other than I, I that love thee more by a hundred times than my mother and my father and all my kind, I that love thee a hundred hundred times more than I love myself, that love thee as no man has loved woman before in the story of our race."

"What wouldst thou then of me," she whispered, "if I have pleased thee so, O thou my prince?"

"There is a condition upon which my Lord will permit me to eat the bread thou makest and to be thine own utterly as it hath been always. Shouldst thou grant it, every thorn will burn with a rose. What singing will rise in the courts of heaven when you and I enter there each with a hand of our child in his own hand. God the Father and God His son——"

"What sayest thou? The sea is over my head. I drown. Make plain thy riddles."

"Leah, Leah, this night must we fare forth together, you and I and the little one. Or I must fare forth alone into the waste place, and my brothers will stone me with stones and my sisters will spit upon me as I pass by."

"Speak, speak!"

"For I go forth out of Israel to-day. I go to the right hand of one whose name is corrupted to thee, of one whose name thou hearest only across the roaring of the rivers of blood. Prepare thyself, Leah, daughter of Christ's race——"

"That word, only the carrion-fowl shriek it!"

"Even so! Prepare thyself, my beloved, to whom I

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must henceforth be abominable and my name an evil odour. Hold thyself upright for the blow I must smite thee with. To thy mother's side, Reuben, place thy two hands about her! Be brave!"

"My heart does not beat!"

"That my own had ceased long ago!"

"Say no word!"

"The word must be said! I must go forth from my people, from my child, from thee. I go forth to Christ Jesus, a young student of the Torah even as myself, that was crucified even as I am crucified and rose from the dead as I shall rise. I will return with Christ ere I be dead, to my people, even to the threshold of this house, to my child, to thee, beseeching you also to love Christ who was bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh, and died for us!"

She was as one dead. There was no hue of mortal blood in her cheeks or lips. Even her brown eyes that had been the colour of beeches with autumn and the sun upon them, were sere as pines fallen a hundred years ago from their roots.

The coke fire that had been banked high before the Sabbath and had glowed so warmly, had eaten its heart out. The crust fell in on the expiring embers. Beyond that there was silence. Eli shivered as though a wind blew in from icy wildernesses. Reuben's large blank, inscrutable eyes were fixed on his father's, unmoving. Leah was as one dead.

Then a low sound came from her, muted by ruin. Her lips did not seem to move.

"That this profanation should fall upon my house!"

Then there was silence again, cold as a shroud, heavy as the wet earth heaped on a coffin newly consigned there.

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Then she spoke once more, but her eyes did not turn towards him. They were disks of clay.

"This is no lie? Thou dost not play with me?"

"This only is truth. There is none other."

Then he saw her head nodding towards her breast and go wagging queerly to one side. He saw her lower jaw drop. He sprang from his torpor and made towards her round the side of the table to prevent her falling forward upon the table among the candlesticks.

His coming was like a flame that scorched her, like a wave shouting. All her faculties came together again. She bared her teeth.

"Do not touch me, *meshummed!*" she shrieked. "Apostate, lay no finger upon me, a daughter of Israel!"

He stood before her, stretching out his hands. She drew back cowering into the arms of her child. She raised her eyes slowly to his, full of a desperate inquiry, a wild unbelief. This was he? This was he. Then his features faded before her sight. When they were once more composed, they bore the semblance of another than himself. Once before she had seen those lips writhe scarlet on a snow-white face, when they had shrilled louder than the whistle of hurtling beams, louder than children splitted upon poles, beyond land and sea in Kravno:

"*Thou, thou*, hast done it? *Thou* hast brought it upon us, outcast from Israel!"

Now no sound issued from those lips. Now merely they gaped and twisted, scarlet upon death-white.

And then consciousness fled from her and she was a small hulk of flesh sliding to the floor from her bright candlesticks and glowing beakers, from all her pageantry of Sabbath, so loved and so desecrated.

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Then the child found tongue! "Father!" he wailed like a homeless ghost. Eli was tottering over to the sink to fill a tumbler of water. "Father, why did you do it?"

"My son, O my son, even as Christ bade!"

Then the child stamped his feet. Great tears coursed down his cheeks. Then he shook his small clenched fists. "I hate Christ, I hate him! I hate him like I hate God!"

CHAPTER EIGHT

THERE was a pounding on the front door beyond the lobby. "Who's that?" asked Eli huskily.
"Maggie!"

He had forgotten. It was Maggie, the fire-goyah, she who attended upon the Sabbath fires of the Jews in the neighbourhood of Jilk Street, and had come now to turn out the gas.

"I will hold up her head. Go thou and let her in. She is a mother of many children and may help us!"

Reuben sped like a shadow to the door. "My mother's ill, Maggie," he moaned. "She's fainted!"

Maggie stormed in with all her tattered wealth of shawl.

"What's happened?" she cried. "What's happened to the poor darlint?" She bustled over to the tap and washed the coal-dust from her hands; then bent down and deftly chafed Leah's brows. "Some wather!" she commanded. "And give me a dish-cloth and some vinegar! Open them doors, Reuben!"

Her ministrations were of no avail.

"'Tis starvin' herself she's been, Mister Eli. Starvin' herself, the blessed child, since ye've been away!"

Eli's eyes burned darkly from his sallow face. He made useless gestures with his hands.

"It is not only that, Maggie!" he said. "It is I! I must be blamed for this!"

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"Surely ye're not manin'——" she began, her mothercraft starting in her bosom like an awakening beast. "Ye're not manin'——." Then she stopped.

"It is not that!" said Eli. "I have broken her heart!"

"What nonsense will ye be talkin' now? Sure ye're just drunk this night, the whole lot of you!" Anxiously, unweariedly, her rubbings and sprayings persisted. Whiter and chaster than lilies Leah's breast was exposed to the guttering gas, her breast and the amulet that lay upon it, to the eyes of her lover who must never know those pale fields again. "Drunk this night," repeated Maggie, "with the grand wine sittin' on the table!"

"No!" cried Reuben, "no! It's wrong! It isn't true!"

"Sure and I was only jokin'. Don't be gettin' cross, Reuben, with your old Maggie!"

The eyes fluttered. "Glory be to God! She's comin' round! What is it you're sayin', lovey? Husht, you, ye mustn't be talkin' now!"

Leah's face was still bloodless as marble, yet the lips would not be gainsaid.

"Is the apostate still in my house?"

Swiftly, with a sudden animosity, Maggie's eyes looked up towards Eli from their seamed pouches.

"Is it you she's manin'?" she whispered. "What is it you've been doin'?"

"Is the apostate still in my house?"

"Husht, Mrs. Leah, you must not be takin' on so!"

"He has slain me!"

"What day's work has been done this day?"

"Bid him begone from my house!"

"Let you be comin' round properly, first, then we'll see how the matter is!"

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"Bid him begone from this house! Let him not one moment more defile it!"

Then Maggie blazed up suddenly. "What are you standin' there for, you dirty man? Is it another woman you've been carryin' on with, some dirty *shikshah* out of the streets?"

"It is no gentile woman I have taken to myself. It is Christ your Lord. I have taken Christ. I go this moment. Breathe into her ear when I have gone that no Jew ever loved woman more."

Such fury as glared from Maggie's eyes, Maggie, the Catholic fire-goyah, who went to Mass so many mornings in the week as her rheumatics did not incapacitate her; such twitching at her fingers as if she would tear the flesh from his cheek-bones.

"From you at least," he said, "a Christian woman, I shall have charity!"

Then the maledictions ripped from her throat.

"Let the Divil be carryin' ye off to Hell this night and be brastin' ye with hot oils. I that thought ye a dacent God-fearin' Jew, and you to be bought up by them black Protestants—or the Salvation Army, is it?—to be gettin' a great week's wages for the unholy work you'll be doin' for them, preachin' at the street-corners with bands and going off with the hussies and feastin' and drinkin' and you all makin' beasts of yourselves. And to be lavin' behind ye this blessed child to be cryin' her heart out for the shame ye'll be bringin' on her, night and day and for ever from now on. Isn't your little child, ayther, enough to hold ye back, that should be the great credit to you the way he goes to the synagogue like a Catholic to Mass. Shame upon ye! It's the Divil's work ye're doing this night, with all this

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grand talk about our blessed Lord, when the best way ye can serve Him is to remain the Jew ye were born. Don't ye know that, bad cess to ye? And we'll be seein' ye creepin' back again in two months or three, because your stomach won't hold pork, not being lined that way. . . .

"What's that ye're sayin', honey? Yes, it's him at the door now. Don't be takin' on! He'll be comin' home to ye before this moon is round and back again! Put your hands about my neck, so, while I lift ye on the chair! It's the drop of wine you'll be takin' now to pull yourself together. Won't ye, now? Yes, that's himself openin' the door!

"Reuben, be you gettin' up this instant from lyin' on the hard floor with the two doors open and the cold winds blowin' in on ye!

"That's the door closed in on him. He's away now. You bide your time, my dear, it won't be long ye're kept waitin'!

"Och Jasus, Mrs. Leah, cry now! Cry and ye'll feel better for it the next minute.

"Is it stone ye're turned into, woman, the cold, cold stone?"

CHAPTER NINE

THE only academic distinction Reuben had ever earned or was ever destined to earn was a small album filled with "Ogdens," a specific cigarette-card which had given its name to the whole genus. When Standard One B was promoted *en bloc* to Standard Two A it was announced by Miss Tompkins, the new teacher, that the album was to be awarded to the "best" boy or girl after a fortnight's experimental observation. To be "best" implied sitting in a state of complete petrification with the arms so folded that each hand clasped an opposed elbow. It was also expected that the back of the skull should rest as nearly as possible upon the nape of the neck. Light as the labour might seem for the gaining of such a prize, the blood that surged in Green Bower and Jilk Street did not congeal easily, and despite conscientious efforts, lasting sometimes nearly a quarter of an hour, Barney Cohen and Millie Ginsberg would soon be forced to confess such sculptural rigidity unnatural to them. Jessie Levi and Nochum Goldstone would decline almost as swiftly from this dizzy perpendicular of virtue, whether Nochum felt himself compelled to carry on a gentle flirtation with Jessie or Jessie to tweak Nochum's ears to see what they felt like.

It was Reuben alone who managed to remain perpetually taut and silent. Miss Tompkins did not know it was his natural deportment; that nothing happened about

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him anywhere to startle him out of this apathy so sadly misconstrued by her as rapt attentiveness. It was her habit to signify her decision that this boy or girl was being "best" by chalking his initials in the corner of her blackboard. It was with great infrequency that Barney Cohen, Millie Ginsberg, Jessie Levi or Nochum Goldstone found their initials so blazoned. Whenever it happened all the other forty-eight heads of Standard Two A swivelled as one head to gaze upon the recipient of the honour, noble in itself and nobler in its potentiality. Upon none more frequently than upon Reuben was this honour conferred. He did not desire it. The raking of his isolation by forty pairs of eyes made him sick and furious. But the lean face, the blank eyes, expressed neither resentment nor gratification. The cigarette-card-album was in due course placed into his hands.

He maintained this reputation for virtue in the distracted bosom of Miss Tompkins and her successors by the restraint with which he forbore from asking questions. It was one aspect, rather more embarrassing than the others, of youthful Jewish vitality in Doomington, that the question any girl or boy might suddenly put to you with a peremptory upstretching of the right hand left no recess of philosophic or sexual decency unprobed. Reuben asked no questions anywhere, for nothing interested him.

Yet upon the day which followed the events lately described it was not without some faint quickening of curiosity that he perceived as he came home from the evening Hebrew School how a bucket of cold water stood outside the doorstep and a jar beside it. He had a dim feeling that he had known the same phenomenon associated with other doorsteps. But he had been too in-

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curious to discover and remember what it portended. He perceived how the neighbours, Mrs. Novik and her daughter, who lived in Number Fourteen, the last house in the street, stooped as they passed by and filled the jar from the bucket and sluiced their hands. He was not unaware that a group of neighbours were gathered on the opposite side of the street, nudging each other and discussing him, it seemed. The children winked and smiled. Some stuck their tongues out at him. He saw his mother seated in the kitchen upon a low stool and was informed that he too must sit on a low stool beside her. Then gradually the room filled with old Jews from the *Ukrainer Chevrah* until there were ten of them, and mysteriously, unnecessarily, they proceeded to recite the evening service. It would have been so much easier and more natural to do it in the synagogue; why had they come to Jilk Street? Then an old man said: "Is the boy's waistcoat torn?" And his mother whispered in a voice that could hardly be heard at all: "It is not yet done, Reb Pinchas. Woe is me, I have forgotten." And he said, "Do not perturb thyself, little daughter, it will be done now."

So they took a knife and made a slit into the top of the left side of his waistcoat, and women appeared bringing with them the two circular foods of mourning, eggs and the small glazed rings of bread called *bagles*, with ashes sprinkled upon them. And his mother was so pale that it seemed she might die. And suddenly the boy shrieked, his voice hoarse with fright:

"What's all this? My poor, poor mother! What are they doing all this for?"

And Reb Pinchas said mildly, softly: "Sha, sha, my child! Thou must be a good boy to thy mother and a

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good Jew and her *nachuss* as she grows older, her pride and consolation; and thou must be her *kaddish* when she is dead to give her soul peace. For she has only thee now. We have come to sit mourning. Thy father is dead!"

"Dead?" he cried. "Dead? It's a lie! You're all telling lies! I met him in the fields when I came home from *chayder* just now and he took and kissed me. Don't believe them, mother! I tell you he isn't dead at all! He isn't dead at all!"

But they would not have it so. Dead he is for ever, they said, as a dog that died in the wilderness. No one would bury his bones.

CHAPTER TEN

I

THE Union found itself unable to cope with the position that faced it upon Eli's return to the Victoria Cabinet Works. Its particular problem was the creation or resolution of difficulties as arising between masters and men. Theology certainly it had deemed to be outside its province. When all the Jews in the Works threatened to resign from the Union if it did not compel the *meshummed*, as they called him, to clear out of the place, for a day or two the Union attempted to overlook the threat. Trade was slack. That was, indeed, the very reason why the matter was brought before the Union rather than the boss. In those days the boss could get workmen rather more easily than the Union unionists. The matter would blow over. But when it was brought to their notice that the hostility of the Christians at the Works was just as vigorous, they felt that something would have to be done, something in the nature of a little honied insinuation.

Eli himself solved the problem for them. He managed to find a place in a Cabinet Works a mile or two away from Begley Hill, on the outer edge of Longton, where he was the only Jew employed, and his presence created, for the present at least, no theological complications. He also found a ground-floor room in Pratt Street not far from the Works. It contained a bed, a table, and a

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chair. There was always enough room for his library, for it had dwindled down to a single volume, a copy of the Scriptures containing the Old and New Testaments.

Often now he hungered and thirsted, for he earned little in his weakness, and the few shillings he formerly had had the power to earn in the past only the unremitting care of his wife had given him strength for. But at the moments when hunger and thirst became acute and he would think of bestirring himself to drain yesterday's milk or the day's before yesterday (for from day to day he forgot its existence) the burning bliss returned to him. It was a bliss not of Christ discovered, Christ a stranger, but Christ long hidden from him by dense intervening vapours, now newly seen, for the first time seen truly. Now newly seen, for the conviction possessed him that he had always known Christ and fled him as at this moment, and for two thousand years his race had known Christ and fled him.

But there were moments of no more bliss. They were the moments when the Jew in his marrow—not the Jew in his soul, for that Christ had conquered—the Jew inter-fused through each drop of blood, the Jew that quivered along the white-hot length of each nerve, arose and cried. It was the Jew the tangled histories had made, the divine loyalties, the incomparable sorrows. It was the Jew of the exile in Babylon, the burnings in Spain, the massacres in Russia. It was the Jew of a hundred dear nothings, as potent as any most grandiose act in the colossal drama—the pudding made out of raisins and stewed carrots, the spinning top to play with on the Feast of the Maccabees, the tumult of the rattles when Haman's name was mentioned during the reading of Esther's tale in the synagogue, the stuffed neck of duck, the jam made out of

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beetroot and hazel-nuts, the high sport on the Passover feasts when the lord of the house hid away the fragment of unleavened bread and the sly children strove to steal it from him—all these, all these. The Jew in him arose and cried, now like a lion, the lion of the tribe of Judah. All his body shook with dismay of its roarings. Now it was a child that wailed, having no word to tell what sadness had befallen it. It looked upon him with eyes of such reproach that he must lower his own. They were his wife's eyes, his son's, his father's, his mother's, the eyes of all his friends, his fathers' fathers, rank beyond rank into the backward abysm.

So he threw himself down before Christ and lifted his hands. So the lion was stilled in him and the child that wailed, for there was one voice only, almost death to hear, so exquisite the voice was: "For even as I have prayed for that other, so I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren."

He knew the scorns that lay before him. He waited only from one day to the next till he felt he had regained sufficient strength not to be overwhelmed wholly by the revilers upon their first onslaught.

And he came down upon Begley Hill, where the Jews are gathered together in Doomington, preaching his Christ.

Have you by some mishap stood alone upon a rock encompassed by the rising sea and known that each wave that snatched at you was instinct with particular hatred and you it was were so hated? Have you stood at the heart of a burning house and known that each flame lusted for you? So was it to be for this poor youth in Dooming-

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ton. But not at first. There was little power in him at the beginning where he stationed himself at street-corners and held forth in frail accents on the joy he brought them. Some thought him mad and that he would recover from the sickness, for a cart had passed over him and subtler injuries than crushed ribs might follow such an accident. These were the more charitable. They had no more tolerance for him than the others, or perhaps, if they had one trifle more, they displayed it by hurrying away when they saw him discoursing at the street-corners. But the others halted with set jaws and smouldering eyes. Had this man been any gross lout who had left the arms of his gentile light o' love to enter the less exhausting service of some society for Jewish conversion, they could not have pardoned him—who could pardon such perfidy?—but they might have understood him a little more. This man, they said, had once attempted to teach the faith to their own children; they had talked of appointing him rabbi at one of the synagogues. There were folk who said that no man in all Doomington was his equal in knowledge of the Torah. They said that no woman in the whole town had been, or was now, a holier daughter of Israel than his wife, but that this shame had brought such a grief upon her that she was not heard to speak. Who should better know the falsity and iniquity of his behaviour than this man, the husband of such a wife, the master of so much knowledge? Granted that the devil had so seized the man as to convince him that the lie he said was truth, would it not have been seemlier that he hid himself in a cellar or in the lair of foxes in some waste place than thus announce it abroad where the children passed between *chayder* and school, school and *chayder*, and the abominable seed might take root in their hearts?

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They needed to have no fear for the children, least of all for them. The youngest of them and those that, being cruel by nature, tore the wings from flies or swung cats about by their tails, found in Eli more delicate sport to hand. The eldest, those that had begun to gamble on the number of goals to be scored in football matches and on horse-racing, exercised a considerable ingenuity in making Eli the central objects of their bets and sweep-stakes. Who could most accurately guess how many minutes he would be allowed to stand upon his box that night at the corner of Crupp Street before the box would be smashed beneath him? Who would be the first to hit him on the mouth that night with a cold boiled potato?

The "lads" of Green Bower and Ealing Street—they were a fearsome corporation whom not even policemen encountered with enthusiasm—as they stood muttering together in the dark entry to Cravitz's Hardware Store, did not perceive that the small lad who had joined them to shelter from the black sleet was Reuben, the son of Eli the apostate, who had been, as it happened, the subject of their conversation for the last ten minutes. Had they perceived that it was Reuben, they would doubtless have discontinued the conversation; but there was nothing in his figure or the dim blur of his face to render him specially recognizable in that gloom. They would have transferred their attentions from father to son, for though their consciences might inform them that the son had not proselytized the father, it was part of their ancestral wisdom and experience that the sins of the fathers were visited upon the children. They would have found that dark entry to Cravitz's Hardware Store an admirable theatre for a little preliminary persecution, a pulling outward of the ears, a

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pressing inward of the nose—to get their hands in, as it were.

It took Reuben no long time to discover who was the theme of the conversation, nor to become aware that his father was to speak in the croft adjacent to the Ealing Street School on the morrow evening. Nor did he remain unaware for long that the “lads” were meditating a violence more organized and vehement than had confronted his father before.

As Reuben leaned back against the wall, a chill lay upon his forehead and in the palms of his hands. He had not been so numb with misery even when his mother had fallen in a swoon upon the kitchen floor, even when they had tried to tell him that his father was dead. If he were dead why did they not leave him so? Why stand whispering in dark corners, planning outrage upon his dead body? What was this God in whose name they did it? So the child asked himself as they stood chuckling there in that obscene dampness.

“Like in a book, Jakey, altogether like——”

“I’m goin’ to pinch a few ’errings. My mother’s got a little barrel of ’errings in the scullery. ’E’s sure to like ’errings.”

“And stuff ’is gob with potato-peelin’s——”

“But first let Chazkal shout: One, Two, Three, *Go!* See, Jakey?”

“Altogether like. Like in a book. The lads are coming in from Green Bower as well, and Crupp Street, but Chazkal’s captain.”

“Shall I lend Chazkal my captain’s whistle?”

“The big lads are coming as well. Blue Barney and Ike Cohen——”

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What was this God in whose name they did it? What was this Christ in whose name he suffered it? Could you see Christ or God? Could you touch them with your fingers? Were they lovely? Wicked they were, wicked, wicked!

He had slid out into the pelting night. He heard them cackle as he crept away. They cackled loud and long about him as he took to his heels and ran out into the wind and rain, out beyond the cap-works and the waterproof works and the synagogue, out beyond Begley Hill towards the greasy slopes of Longton.

Here it was. This was Pratt Street. His father had whispered the name to him that evening, Pratt Street beyond the Blenheim Road, Number Six, the window to the right of the door.

"Shouldst thou desire me, Reuben my child——"

There was a light burning in the room to the right of the door. The child tapped on the window-pane. A shadow lengthened on the wall and thrust out hugely upon the ceiling. He heard the sound of footsteps approaching and the door drawn back.

"Who is it? It is not thou? It is not Reuben? My son, my son, enter! Come in from the rain!"

"No, father! I haven't time to come in! I must go away quickly!"

"Thou also, Reuben? Will not my child know me?"

"Is it right I should go into your house, father, when I'm with mamma? How can I go in? Can I?"

"Thou hast said it, my son. With her or with me. Thou wouldst tell me something? Say it speedily. I cannot keep thee in this black night!"

"Father, is it true you are going to talk in the fields near Ealing Street School to-morrow?"

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"Even so."

"You must not go to-morrow. You must go somewhere else."

"Why shall I not go?"

"Please, please!"

"Why shall I not go?"

"The lads are coming from all round. They're going to mob you. You must, you *must*, stay away!"

"It is not in my power to stay away!"

"All the big boys. They'll throw things at you, knock you down and hit you with sticks."

"Hast thou not read, Reuben, how David sang: 'He delivereth me from mine enemies: yea, thou liftest me up above those that rise up against me: thou hast delivered me from the violent man?'"

"How shall I stay away? Shall I be afraid?"

"You're not a strong man like other fathers."

"I am stronger than my enemies."

"Daddy, daddy, please!"

"This thing I may not do. Go, my child, home to thy mother. Why dost thou wear nothing about the neck?"

"Good-night, father!"

"Good-night, son!"

Long he stood bare-headed upon the step with the rain beating down upon him, looking into the darkness where the noise of the boy's running had ceased. Then he shook his head and walked slowly back into his room again, to the light of his one candle and his single book.

II

Still half an hour to go before evening *chayder*. So said the alarm-clock on the kitchen mantelpiece in Jilk Street.

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Two minutes before the half-hour he would jump up from the chair beside the fire-guard and run straight there, looking neither left nor right. *Chayder* would drag out its three hours' length and he would run straight home again. He would say his head was hot and she would send him to bed at once. There he would fall asleep. He would be thinking of it no more—how the lads had gathered together and what they carried and what foul words they said. And how he lay under their feet and how they kicked him. . . .

He shivered. He bent down towards her box and lifted Miriam the hen into his arms, trying to forget. He could not forget. The thought had stuck talons into him. His father lay under their feet. They kicked him. He went into the parlour-shop where his mother stood slicing the *ingber* for her diminished trade.

"Mamma, can I buy anything in for you?"

"What is there to buy, my son?" Why was her voice cold like a slab in the street? It had once been a thing that ran and shone, like water.

He returned into the kitchen again. Twenty-three minutes still to go. They slapped his face with salted herrings and stuffed his mouth with potato-peelings. He lay under their feet. (The knuckles gripping the fire-guard were tight and pale.) They kicked him.

There was a smell of blood, harsh, unmistakable, in the child's nostrils. He saw it start slowly from the broken flesh above his father's brows. . . .

He had fled from the kitchen through the parlour, crashed the door to behind him.

"What is with thee? Whither goest thou?" his mother cried. He did not regard her. He was upon the croft against the Ealing Street School. He saw them where

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they were gathered together, men and women that jeered, and the lads. He saw the filth hurtling through the air, where his father stood, beseeching, holding out his hands. He saw them clot together and lurch forward. Then he hurled himself, miserable frail child, upon them.

So had this beleaguered man once, transported into just such an ecstasy and borrowing strength from it not his own, so had he hurled himself against odds—in Russia, in a creek by the Dnieper, where a huge peasant leered lustfully down on a girl's white body. So, too, the child's blind fury prevailed and his enemy crumbled before him.

"You cowards!" he shrieked, almost too shrilly to hear. His small fists were in their eyes and mouths. His feet stormed amongst their legs and many carried away sharp bruises. "You cowards, you dirty cowards!"

But the issues of that earlier Russian invasion and this in Doomington were not the same. A minute or two and the ranks of the lads were drawn together again, incredulous and ashamed that this pale booby had wrought such havoc in so short a time.

"It's his son!" they cried gleefully. "It's the *meshum-med's* son! Come along, lads! Get to it!"

It was a richer festival than they had hoped for.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

ELI had never achieved human contacts before, saving with the few people he had loved. Caught in the close meshes of his own brain, there had always been interposed between himself and others a labyrinth he must painfully unwind. If he found his way out at length there was none waiting to meet him. He had no sense of adaptation to differences. He could attempt to convince Sergei the moujik of the stupidity of the racial murder accusation with as learned a series of talmudic arguments as he would deploy in the synagogue before the greybeards. In his efforts to teach a small child the alphabet of the holy tongue he would drag him by the ears into a forest of Kabbala.

That was at an end now. He had not drawn from his new experience a new armoury of intellectual arguments. If the lull in the tumult about him during his street-corner oratories were sufficiently prolonged, no man or woman could fail to realize that he drove straight to the heart something of terror and beauty. No man but felt his blood insidiously quickened. Whereas once the man that stood there, threatening, pleading, had not the faculty to convey a direct meaning even to one creature, now there was no member of the crowd who listened to him, or did not listen, who did not feel that to himself and himself alone the speaker conveyed particular, desperate messages. It was this fearful potency that infuriated them most of all.

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More and more stern the opposition to him became, hardening from the mockery or contempt which had at first confronted him into grim hatred. Yet there were not lacking those who marvelled to see how the valour of this creature, single-handed and a weakling, burned more imperiously the more perilously his enemies beset him.

Well they might marvel one particular day on that same croft by the Ealing Street School, when there had been a convocation of the loutish sort from every alley of Begley Hill and Longton. Many a ten times stronger man would have disappeared inconspicuously so soon as he saw that so ominous a gathering awaited him. But Eli had passed beyond the stage when physical violence intimidated him. The spectacle added fire to his eyes and a wild poignancy to his speech. There were many youths there that evening who had not heard him before, and though the intention had been not to allow him to proceed for more than a sentence or two, his strange lucidity, that serenity culminant upon passion, held them back. They shuffled awkwardly. They remembered the purpose for which they had come, and booed. For it had been decided in their courts that the apostate was to be given little more tolerance. And as the fire waned in his eyes and his throat became hoarser, they booed more loudly, they closed in upon his box more and more threateningly.

Then of a moment they were aware of a new ardour that sprang from him and sent them recoiling, as it might be a barrier of swords. His voice rose like a bird's in passionate circles of expostulation. They did not know that one more young man had added himself to their number, a young man, indeed, whom they knew hardly at all for he did not share their enthusiasms. He appeared and disappeared, no man knew why and whither. His name

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was Dovvid Pollock. Even as he spoke, before he had set eyes on him, Eli had become aware that a new element of disturbance, subtler, more incalculable, than the rest, was introduced into the atmosphere. Then he beheld the shaggy locks and the head and the huge shoulders. Then the eyes seized and held him.

He had never known an expression of such pride and self-satisfaction. The eyes glittered with the glory of achievement. He seemed to sniff the air and inhale its odours joyfully. Having sown the seed so wisely, how good it was to stand breast-deep amongst the harvest. But there was something more in those eyes than pride and self-satisfaction. There was a mockery fiendish as a sky jagged with lightning. The mockery with which these others had met him seemed merely babyish and inept.

Yet there was a firmament where the sun and the stars are composed in their courses and the lightnings do not flare. There was a truth established behind mockery where Christ hung on his cross and the lightnings did not flare and the mockers were gone away. So it was that they became aware of a new ardour like a barrier of swords, and his voice rising more intolerably wild and sweet than ever before, in passionate circles of expostulation. Never again was he so compelling nor were they so subdued. So high he rose into the empyrean singing the love of Christ that at length all other consciousness but Christ was forgotten. As of old he spoke a tongue that his hearer could not grasp; but it was the speech not of the mind's excessive subtlety, but of the beatific vision. They stood there with jaws fallen and entranced faces. No voice was heard save his own, and that dimly.

Then, his wings slowly fluttering, he came down out of his exaltation again, aware of himself in Doomington,

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upon the croft by the Ealing Street School, and of the awakening faces about him. He heard a rumour in their throats and the shouts thickening there again. He saw a movement amongst them more sinister than before. For a great fear had fallen upon them. Should they listen so seduced again, whither might they not be led? Lo, how perilous a silence had that been! Should they be silent thus once more, then all was vain. To no purpose had the Covenant been granted to Abraham and to the sons of Israel for ever. To no purpose were all the thirst and hunger and wandering and the shedding of blood. For their silence was betrayal; wheresoever in the walls of Judah the breach was made, not long would the stoutest bastion remain nor the midmost citadel. They pressed in upon him, their fingers twitching.

And at that moment once more he set eyes upon Dovvid Pollock. The huge head lolled loosely and ludicrously upon the neck. The eyes were ashen as the moon's craters. They were like a battlefield at night, in winter, where both armies have died in the knowledge that the battle was useless.

A shivering seized Eli's frame. He became aware of each noise in that hideous hubbub about his ears and of each hand raised against him. He saw the opened mouths and the teeth. He dived under the hands, the box was kicked from under his feet; with a whinny of terror he took to his heels and fled.

He fled like a beast to its den, to the one place in the world where he belonged, where his mate would take him in and lick his wounds and soothe him with her warmth. He had no other consciousness saving of her and the fire and the kitchen and the chair beside it where his child was sitting. They would not get him there, their hot breath

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would not be at his neck. For hours they might thunder at the door, then they would grow weary, and leave them. Her hands would be on his brow as of old.

Terror winged his feet. Joyfully they pelted after him. But there was one amongst them who, like Dovvid Pollock, had been standing at some distance apart, and knew a swifter way to the house in Jilk Street, for it was soon evident that Eli was making there, evident at least to his son. Reuben tore through the front-door of a house and out through its back-door and across an entry, and again through a back-door and a front-door and across a street. Finally he was at the back-door of his own house and in the kitchen where his mother stood cooking at the fire.

"Father!" he cried. "Quick! They're running after him! They want to murder him! He's running this way! The front-door!"

He had already darted through the kitchen and into the lobby and flung the door open. A noise of shouting approached from beyond the corner of the street. It came nearer. He found himself dragged inside and the door shut to and bolted.

"He shall not enter here!" his mother cried.

"Mamma, mamma!" He wrung his hands.

The shouting was in the street. He was a few doors away. He was here.

"Let him in!" he cried. "He is my father!"

"He is nothing! He is dead! We know him not!"

They heard the sound of his fists hammering at the door.

"Mamma, Mamma!" he implored. He tried to pull her away. He tore at her skirts. He sprang at her face and kissed her. His face was wet with tears. Hers was dry

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as sand. She did not move. Her heart tolled within her, ebbing, sickening.

He sank down sobbing at her feet. The hammering grew louder for a moment, then fainter and fainter, and was still. But the shouting beyond the door persisted.

It was the baying of hounds that had run down their quarry.

CHAPTER TWELVE

IF she asked him where he had been those evenings when he came in late, or those Sabbath days when he disappeared after the meal at midday and did not return till the last service was over, he lied. He said that the teacher had kept him in after hours in *chayder* or that he had been listening to the old men expounding Torah in the synagogue. How should he abandon his father, so frail and lonely, because this bad Christ had put him under a spell? There would never again be felicity in Jilk Street as of old, with his father placidly or furiously turning the leaves of his big books and his mother at the fire stirring the thickening mass of *ingber*, and himself with a large green apple to turn round and round in his hands. These days she no more remembered to keep a large green apple for him. She did her duties in the kitchen and the shop and sat down when they were over and at length rose to the bedroom and he followed. And it was because he thought she might be cold that he had risen from his own small bed and went over to sleep in hers, where his father used to be before Christ called him away. But could he abandon his father because of Christ? Or could he cease to love his mother because of God? If ever she spoke it was to utter God's name. God seemed to dry her lips and take the light from her eyes. Who was it that had made this God and this Christ? Or had they never been made at all?

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So Reuben fared forth to Pratt Street in Longton where the road rises away to Weedon Park. And he would tap on the window-pane and Eli would come forth and take his son's head gently between his hands and look into his eyes. He had not asked the boy a second time to come in. They would set out hand in hand in all weathers, preferably during rain and mist, for then there was less chance of meeting the folk of Begley Hill. There was less chance that jeers and curses should follow them or that some fleet-foot mischief should carry the tale to a silent woman in Jilk Street how her son had been seen walking with his father, Eli the apostate.

Upon these days Eli's heart ached with such woeful perplexity that he thought now at last it must break. Had he the right to refrain from bringing Christ to this lost child? In a few months or a year would be the time of his *bar-mitzvah*, his confirmation. They would confirm him, the stubborn ones, in the blindness wherewith they had so long been blind. Dare he withhold from him the Sacrament, the Atonement? Must he allow his child's soul to parch in those deserts where the Lamb's blood may not flow?

Or should he use what power of suasion had been granted him and—much more forceful than that—the power of the love between them, to wean him from his faith, from his mother already so smitten and bereaved?

But in the dusk, in the loneliness, only one voice remained with him of all those that had cried or whispered that day—those that had jeered at him, his son who had walked beside him holding his hand, his wife who had stood like a wraith by a tomb. One voice remained, saying: "So I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren."

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And if his brethren must be strengthened, must his child be left to his weakness, alone and lost?

So upon these days when they went walking together, he played with his son a losing hand for Christ. At first he introduced the name with caution, seeing the child wince at the mention of it, and afraid lest Reuben be frightened from his side, lest he no more seek his father out, tapping furtively at the window. Then he spoke of him with more courage, as the sound of the word became familiar between them. And then slowly he was forced to learn that the small lad whose hand he held, this child who was his son, was more impervious to his argument and to Christ's name than the youths who howled most lewdly at the street-corners. For those others shook their fists, a rage came upon them. Therefore there was hope. But the hand of Reuben became remote and chill within his own, as he told the tale of the sufferings of Christ and what things he had said and what kingdom was promised those who believed he rose from the dead, being the Son of God. And Eli was aware how Reuben's eyes that had taken some life into them when his father appeared at the door and they took each other's hands and set forth, how his eyes became indifferent and empty. Till the child himself put an end to it one evening, awaking of a sudden from this chill stupor.

"Father!" he said.

"My son?"

"It isn't fair to my mother if you talk to me of this Christ! I am eating her bread and butter till I am old enough to go out and earn money so that she shan't work any more and she shall have cakes!"

"That thou shouldst have need to think these thoughts when I for many years should be earning money for us all,

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working till there was no skin on my hands. Shame upon me!"

"It is my mother's bread I am eating now! It isn't right that I should listen to all this about Christ. Christ has been very cruel to my mother."

"That she might let him be kind!"

"Father, when I am a man and leave school and go to work, then talk to me of Christ. I do not like him. I shall never like him. But it will be fair if I listen then. Father, please, father!"

"What then?"

"Please never speak of him again. Or how can I come to you?"

Eli said no word. They walked on in silence and came back into Longton again. At the corner of Pratt Street, the boy left him, running swiftly home to his mother, to the half-lit kitchen where the gas-jet must always be kept burning low. For gas was dear and there was little money to pay for it.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

WHOSE voice had it been then that spoke into his ear that night of mist among the damp, unreclaimed coppices that fringed Weedon Park? Whose voice than the devil's? How should Dovvid Pollock have known that he would be wandering under that far outpost of Doomington?

"Aren't you glad, dear Eli, that our miracle succeeded?"

What had the voice meant? And yet it had seemed more than a voice, Dovvid Pollock himself, swinging his great shoulders away under the dripping trees. But he had not eaten for many hours. Days, was it? Was it not merely one of those same trees seeming to move, an illusion of the starved senses?

If it were Dovvid Pollock in truth, and not the devil, how should he so infallibly have known that hour of too great anguish, when it seemed at length that the cross was too great to bear, that the moment was come either to discard it or to sink under its weight, crushed utterly? How should he have guessed?

For what if, indeed, the miracle had been induced by some trickery of Dovvid Pollock's mind triumphantly willing the thing out of whatever demon darkness he lurked in, some festering pit in Doomington or some cavern in lone mountains at the end of Europe—what then, what happened then?

He groaned aloud. "My soul is exceeding sorrowful," he said, "even unto death."

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How cunning had it been of Dovvid so to plant the seed in his mind, the seed of expectancy; so that when at last the favourable moment came, the task was not more difficult than any telepathising trickster on the music-halls might have managed.

What happened if this were the truth of it, of the gathering, transfixing radiance, of the blood flowing, the carved head that turned, the dumb lips that spoke?

Shame on a faith that needed for its warrant a particular dispensation, a contortion of the laws of nature. But had this not been the motive-power of his agonies? Where had he been at this moment if the blood had not flowed and the lips spoken? In the synagogue, threading the intricate labyrinths of nowhere? But when he returned home, his child would have been at his side, his wife over against him, her brown eyes brimmed with light.

He beat his breast. "Christ also has heard thee, my Lord Christ, saying: 'All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.' I will not worship thee!"

All night he wandered in the spirit's desolate places. Grey dawn came, less grey than the hollows under his eyes.

It was evening, the time when he must go forth to his people, to whatever fortune awaited him there, the violence which he could bear even should he die of it, and that crying out against his Lord which he could not bear—even though he knew it to be made in the name of millennial injuries, burning towns and outraged women and slaughtered babes.

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But it was to no place in Longton or Begley Hill that he found his steps impelled that evening, not to the croft by the Ealing Street School nor any of the street-corners where his coming was a signal for them to leave all other tasks and to crowd about him, jeering. He was taking the steep downhill road from Longton to the region by the river where the factories were. There was no escaping the summons. He must go.

Was it too late? Was Dovvid Pollock then damned to irretrievable perdition? What was the significance of his eyes, the way they were smitten and blasted, that evening on the croft near the school? Was it the consciousness of the sin against the Holy Ghost? Or if it was not too late, might some other light be spread abroad in his eyes, some other light than the hell-flame that had so long inhabited there?

Here was the waterproof-goods warehouse over the River Mitchen where Dovvid Pollock kept on his room from season to season. Eli climbed the wooden stairs and paused a moment before the door of Dovvid's room. The rancid odour of waterproof pervaded the thick air.

Why did Dovvid not call now? He had been calling all day. How often had Dovvid not anticipated any sensuous assertion of Eli's arrival. Why did he not call? Eli knocked at the door. There was no reply. He waited. Then he turned the handle. The door was not locked. He entered.

The same litter of books, the confusion of canvases, the innumerable carved cigarette-boxes. There was a shadow upon them all of a dangling corpse. From a stout hook in the ceiling, Dovvid Pollock swung darkling.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

I

THERE was no escape for young Reuben from the sorrow that had befallen his house excepting into that apathy which was more mortiferous than sorrow itself. For sorrow was a condition in which at least certain faculties, the emotions, were kept living, even if they lived too acutely for an organism else so torpid. Nothing in Doomington interested him. It was not as if he were troubled by ancestral instincts that fought blindly to be free from that pall of smoke, the high factories, the dingy streets; to return to those reaches of river, the meadows of maize, the vast forests that bounded them—to that landscape where for some centuries his blood had laboured and trafficked and been content. Neither any ancestral instinct nor the tales his father and mother more directly recounted of that country had created any nostalgia within him. He walked with outward eyes which did not see and inward which saw no more. At school his automatic petrification had now ceased to convey the impression of “goodness,” convenient though it was, and not to be deplored should certain of his classmates attempt a partial imitation of it. His teachers had begun to feel that light gained in luminosity through the adjacence of shadow, that “goodness” could not be philosophically deemed “goodness” without a little “badness”

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—not too much—for the opposite quality to overcome. They thought Reuben stupid, and Mr. Sant, for instance, did not refrain from telling him so. It did not disturb him any more than praise once gratified him. If he discovered any virtue in *chayder*, it was that it absorbed most of the rest of the day. The mournful simultaneous chanting of thirty little boys in a small room with closed windows made you sleepy and you came home and had some black bread and some cocoa for supper and went to bed. Then you got up and said your prayers (you were, of course, always saying your prayers; it was neither a pleasure nor a nuisance, merely a part of being alive, like wearing boots). Then you went to school and came back and had dinner and went to *chayder* and said your prayers. Then you went to school again and came back and had your tea and went to *chayder* and said your prayers and came back and went to bed. And you were a year older. And you were another year older.

Excepting this meaningless hateful battle between God and Christ. It meant nothing to him, it seemed to be about nothing at all. Who were they? What did they want? They had broken everything, destroyed everything, and they were not even as real as the white, sooty, nameless cat or Miriam the hen. What trick had they to compare with the cat's standing on the kitchen windowsill outside in the yard and pressing down the latch with the right paw to let himself in? Miriam the hen, it was true, was not so intelligent, but she was affectionate, at least, in a watchful furtive manner.

Once a herd of cows had been driven through Longton. Nobody knew why they came or whither they went or what on earth they could have been doing in Doom-

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ington at all. But the spectacle of them made Reuben happier than he had ever been before. It was not perhaps that he was happy as that a picture and a movement established themselves in his mind and were a focus for queer disjointed fancies. There must be people who owned cows and they looked after them and they all stood knee-deep together in tall grass. And there would be resplendent hens in those places, with feathers like bronze. Miriam in that company would be a sad creature. And cats and dogs and goats. Goats with horns and beards. And heifers.

But the fancy began to exhaust itself. To conceive the appearance of goats was too arduous a task for a mind so untutored in the art of imaginative self-presentation. And what were heifers? Only a little more than a word, just a little more than Christ or God. He subsided into torpor again, a grey world.

Cartwright's Curiosity Shop was in the Doomington Road, opposite the gaol and not far from the river. He had once seen his father making his way in that direction, and it had occurred to him that he might be useful if his father should meet with any trouble. It happened that his father was making his way to Dovvid Pollock, who lived not far off, and the boy determined that he might as well spend a few minutes outside Cartwright's window as anywhere else, till his father appeared again and he could whisper some suggestion of time or place for their next meeting.

They had found it convenient to meet there for a hurried moment more than once. It was on Reuben's third or fourth visit to Cartwright's shop that a yellow flicker of stone caught his eye behind a heap of books

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and pewter pots and carved chess-men and fans and candle-sticks. It was not stone, it was plaster, but Reuben did not know the difference. The object was thrust away behind all this motley as if Mr. Cartwright was half-hearted in his expectation of disposing of it. You could only get a clear view of it by ascending Mr. Cartwright's step (under danger of incurring Mr. Cartwright's displeasure) and looking through the side-window along an irregular lane of more saleable goods. But when at last you got a clear view, what you saw was the head and shoulders of a man cut out (as you thought) in stone.

Reuben knew it was more than a man. He knew it was a god; but he did not apply that word to it, partly because its associations were so harsh, largely because he knew you might speak of God in the jealous singular, but not in the urbane, differentiated plural. The teachers at the Ealing Street School had declared frequently in frigid accents their detestation of things called "idols." He had encountered the same creatures during the translation of the Bible in *chayder*, and there the abhorrence expressed for them was even more uncompromising. It was obvious that this thing was not an "idol" because all authorities were agreed on the detestable hideousness of those monsters. They had flat noses, enormous mouths with protruding teeth, ears that stood away from the head, one eye or three. It was conceivable that it was of the race of "graven images," against which he remembered certain quite explicit decrees. But "graven images" seemed generally to have taken the form of a calf or a fish; and though the thought of a graven calf or fish, even when set up upon altars and worshipped, never had stirred his childish bosom to indignation, this thing in

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Cartwright's window was more than either, it was more than a man, more than the loveliest man who had ever been born since the beginning of the world.

Yet it was manlike, visible, tangible (could Mr. Cartwright but divine how the tips of his fingers ached to pursue, how fearfully, how reverently, those smooth slopes under the chin and the line of the nose and the brows!). It had meaning. It had authority. He realized suddenly that it belonged to that order of conception to which God and Christ also belonged. He decided at once that it was greater than they, greater than calf or fish or man or Christ or God.

He knew, though he knew it dimly, as a sensation rather than a thought, and not for many years would he so fashion that knowledge into words—he knew that, firstly, it was the image of an idea; so that, should that particular piece of material be destroyed, the idea would persist invincibly. It would persist in his own head. It would go down to the grave with him. He knew also that it was in itself splendid and imperious; that the idea must express itself again and again and again into stone till there was no more world.

These feelings came to him slowly, clarifying themselves in a gradual sure dawn, during the pilgrimages he made to the window of Cartwright's Curiosity Shop and to other more decorous shrines in later years. In the earlier pilgrimages it was with a sort of pained surprise that he noted the incomparable felicities combined into this piece of disregarded merchandise. It was a pained surprise because he obscurely felt he had been cheated in so much as the thing had not been brought into his vision before. It endowed life with meaning and importance if it could so render itself, into such a poise of

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the head, such a line of the shoulders. The hair rolled under and behind his ears with the magnificence of trees and clouds. It was waved over his brows with more than the majesty of the sea. A robe, fastened above the right shoulder, fell over the left, assured and full, like night. The silence of his lips was more lucid than any speech. The empty eye-sockets were more kingly than any eyes.

Mr. Cartwright became restive. More than once he loomed up threateningly from behind the bead-curtain that separated the shop from his private chambers. It was like the ominous thickening of a deep-sea fish into a swimmer's waters out of its deep retirements. And Reuben set himself to the titan task of collecting six halfpennies in order to buy a threepenny packet of Foreign Stamps, Assorted (of all dull futilities), so to prolong the lease of his door-step hauntings.

Here when school and *chayder* between them had taken all colour and sound from sky and air would Reuben betake himself to do obeisance. Or when his heart was racked with misery for the dumb anguish of his mother, or when his cheeks burned with shame for some new anguish they had inflicted upon Eli, he would find solace, bowed before this dusty altar, its sole hierophant. Life was not hollow. It was not divided wholly between nothingness and woe. He spoke to no one of his discovery, his new strange loyalty, and to his mother or father least of all. How would jealous God endure it? Or what part could Christ play here, so doomed to thorns and nails?

Only once he betrayed himself. He had on more than one occasion observed another boy pause and dawdle before Cartwright's window. He might have been a year

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or two older or younger than himself, it was hard to tell, for the face seemed older than the body, and the eyes seemed full of years while the mouth was petulant as a child's. One thing was certain. He was one of those clever scholarship boys the very thought of whom froze Reuben into complete dumbness. He wore the green-circled and eagle-crested cap of Doomington School. Yet he was not so formidable as some. He became aware of the other boy's visits and was evidently curious what it was had attracted him. He was even a little afraid, if the truth were told, for he and his friends had set their hearts upon the acquisition of a telescope, and though Reuben hardly seemed likely to forestall them in the purchase, there was never any anticipating what sort of uncle the most unpromising nephew might hold in reserve. The boy with the eagle-crested cap was soon reassured, for Reuben by ascending the doorstep put the desired telescope out of his line of vision. It may, of course, have been a ruse, thought the scholarship boy, who, though not naturally suspicious, had been of late somewhat degraded by this lust for a telescope. Reuben himself put him out of his suspense. Reuben had long felt that there was no likelier source of information regarding the name and nature of the image than the learned young member of Doomington School, whom he had more than once seen overburdened by a satchel of books half as large as himself.

"Please, can you tell me," he stammered out one evening (he was not certain whether he ought to say "sir")—"Please, can you tell me who that is?"

"That?" said the other. "What?"

"*That!*" pointed Reuben. "Can you see? It's like made out of stone!"

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"Oh, I see! You mean that bust over there!" The voice expressed a certain satisfaction on the part of the owner that he was possessed of the requisite knowledge, combined with a certain sentiment of relief. "Don't you know who that is?" he said airily. "That's Apollo!"

"Who's that, please?"

"Apollo? He was one of the Greek gods, the god of the sun. I don't suppose you've read Shelley about him, have you?"

"Who's Shelley?"

"The poet!"

"Oh!"

"Are you coming down this way? I've got to be getting on to my homework! I'll tell you about Shelley."

They moved away from the curiosity shop.

"My name's Massel, Philip Massel," said the boy from Doomington School. "What's yours?"

Reuben was about to reply.

"So you don't know Shelley?" intercepted the other. "He wrote a Hymn of Apollo. I think you'd like it. It's one of the hard ones. How does it go now? You know, it's what that Greek god is supposed to be saying when they had a competition, Apollo and Tmolus. Oh, yes, I remember. One of the verses goes like this:

*I feed the clouds, the rainbows and the flowers
With their ethereal colours; the Moon's globe
And the pure stars in their eternal bowers
Are cinctured in my power as with a robe:
Whatever lamps on earth——"*

But Philip Massel was not destined to finish his quotation from Shelley then or at any future time, for it did not chance that the two boys ever met again. He heard

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his companion exclaim, "My father!" and saw him run from beside him to a haggard man some yards away, clutching at a lamp-post for support, his jaw dropping as if he would be sick.

"What is with thee, father?" he heard the boy cry. "Art thou ill?"

"Lo!" said the other. "I have been in Aceldama, even unto the potter's field, the field of blood! Go from me! Go from my side!"

II

Reuben judged his mother must be asleep now. While she was still awake she lay by his side rigid as a plank, as if the thoughts that surrounded her were thorns and if she moved, she bled. For an hour now she had been tossing about uneasily on the feather-bed, that same *perinny* that had accompanied her from Kravno over many lands. She had once been so careful to distribute all its feathers as evenly as silk, so that Eli might sleep soundly after his day's work. Now she did not seem to notice if the stuffing was all packed together in two or three places and elsewhere there was only the bare cloth for covering. She had thrown her arm out along the pillow. Her breath came fitfully.

She must be asleep now. It would be safe to put them to the test. It would be silly, he knew it would be silly. But he must be fair to them. He must give them their chance.

Upon this evening, Shevuoth, the Feast of Weeks, had begun. This was the feast, the *yomtov*, that commemorated the granting of the law upon Sinai. Tomorrow they would read in the synagogue the passage

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from Exodus wherein the thunderous story was told. It had been translated for them this afternoon in *chayder*.

And it came to pass that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled.

And Mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly.

But the boys had played "picture, blank—blank, picture," with their cigarette-cards under the table, as if there had been no smoke upon Sinai. And the thin, querulous voice of the teacher had concluded the translation and he had risen to put on his threadbare frock-coat and green silk hat. And in so doing, he had said, "*Nu, kinderlach*, and if any of you wishes to stay up all night you too shall see the heavens open up, as they opened up then on Mount Sinai. For on the night of Lag Beomar and on this night of Shevuoth also, it is granted the Jew that he may behold the skies part in sunder. And if any of you has luck, tell me when *yomtov* is over and I will give that boy a penny. Good *yomtov*, children, good *yomtov*. Be good boys in the synagogue to-morrow."

Reuben had heard a corroboration of it in the synagogue that evening. Some one had expressed his determination to stay up all night for the opening of the heavens, and some one else had asked how much he had taken up his fire insurance for and whether he had sent his wife to Blackpool. A few people were amused, but mostly they were very shocked, and thought the joke in the worst possible taste. Then Reb Pinchas told the company severely how his own brother as a young man in

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Ekaterinoslav had been smitten with a fever and instead of wrapping himself up in blankets and swathing his brows, neck, and chest in goose-fat as the doctor had recommended, he stood all night in a field waiting till the heavens opened, for it was the night of Lag Beomar, when healing came from the opened heavens to the pupils of Rabbi Akiba affected by the plague. And the heavens opened, and his brother was quit of his fever and never suffered from another. That was merely Lag Beomar. The heavens opened more augustly on the night of Shevuoth. Another relative of his had been cured of deaf-and-dumbness in the moment the heavens opened; a friend, whose wife had gone off to live in sin with a gentile merchant, waited up for and beheld the same celestial phenomenon. His wife returned to him next morning, sobbing and wringing her hands.

"Tscha!" exclaimed Reb Pinchas, turning round indignantly on the cynic. "And will jokes still be made about fire insurances?" The cynic was crumpled up against the women's partition. He seemed to apprehend that the heavens might start opening before he had got home safely, to deal out condign punishment to all cynics.

Reuben climbed carefully out of bed and crept along the bare floor. Very slowly he slipped back the catch and opened the lower half of the window. It squeaked. He paused fearfully. She did not awaken. Her arm moved palely down the pillow. He thrust his head out into the blackness. The lamp at the open end of Jilk Street had been extinguished. The sky was nothing more than a thinning of the darkness where the walls of the opposite side of Jilk Street ended and itself began. Even by thrusting his head quite dangerously out of the win-

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dow he did not command too large a circuit of the sky. But if the heavens actually opened, there was no doubt he would catch some segment at least of the aperture. He heard the big clock from Doomington gaol boom twelve.

The big clock boomed one, boomed two. The heavens did not open.

If they should, who would appear there? Would it be God, the God of the Jews? But what if his father spoke the truth? Might it not be Christ?

It was acutely uncomfortable, leaning out so and clasping the cold window-sill and twisting the head every few minutes up into the obstinate skies.

If it were God, must he be a good Jew henceforth, such as his father had once been, and when he had finished school, must he spend all his time between the *yeshiveh* and the synagogue, until perhaps they made a rabbi out of him and he sat in a dark kitchen and waited for the women to bring their hens to him, were they kosher or not.

The thought bowed down his head with weariness. He felt his chin snap against the cold sill. He rubbed his eyes violently. The clock boomed the half-hour.

What if it were Christ? When at last they had wearied his father out, must he himself take his father's place at the street-corners? How should he find courage to stand out against the shouts and the blows? And he did not love Christ. He loved neither Christ nor God.

The clock boomed three.

His neck was tired with vain twisting. His chin rested on the sill and it struck cold no longer. His leaden eyelids kept dragging down across his eyes. Then a sudden white memory asserted itself. The brows and the eyes

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and the lips. The hair waved like the sea. The proud neck, the robe falling. Apollo. All his faculties sprang into wakefulness.

Perhaps it would be Apollo, no other than Apollo, whom the disparted heavens would manifest? O he must keep awake now. Suppose the heavens opened and Apollo stood there looking down in his splendour? Who else than himself in all Doomington would have eyes for Apollo?

He looked long and alertly into the impenetrable heavens. They did not open. There was no sign of Apollo, his hair or eyes. The clock boomed again. The heavens paled with dawn.

"Perhaps," the boy muttered, "Apollo doesn't like to show himself in Doomington where God and Christ are. Perhaps he goes to some other country."

There was a first noise of carts in the streets. The light blew in like a chill wind. He shut the window and crept back into bed. His mother's arm closed about him.

Nu, my child," he heard his mother say. "And did the heavens open and the Above One show Himself to thee?"

"No, mother, there was nothing to see!"

"Alas, alas!" she murmured.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

I

JILK STREET was bitterly conscious of the shame cast upon it by the apostasy of Eli. The women especially reproached themselves for not having scented the infection long ago. They began to remember certain signs and portents. For instance, they said, he used frequently not to kiss the *mezuzah*, the sacred scroll nailed on the door-post, as he passed in and out. It was not true, of course. Only once he had remitted it—that night when he staggered forth with the shrill taunts of Maggie, the fire-goyah, ringing in his ears. Even then his hand had risen mechanically half-way to the *mezuzah*, but it had dropped to his side again as if a flame had scorched it. The fertile imaginations of the women further invented certain lewd private saturnalia when Eli had been discovered in the depths of Weedon Park wallowing among pork chops and rashers of bacon. One lady swore that she had seen a purse handed over to him by a Christian clergyman, and that he had made the sign of the cross before and after receiving it. The younger generation of women preferred to interpret the matter in terms of a grand passion and were convinced that Eli had fallen desperately in love with his nurse, Mrs. Travers, a lady already not unfamiliar in Begley Hill. Eli's conversion had been the price of her favours. The undisputed fact that Eli had been seen in conversa-

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tion with Mrs. Travers on two or three occasions, in broad daylight too, lent the theory all the corroboration it needed.

These speculations were withheld from Leah's ears. For her there was nothing but sympathy. Mrs. Levitsky displayed a heart of gold and, in those early days, when the strange sickness fell upon Leah, there would often have been no food at all in the house if not for Mrs. Levitsky's kind ministrations. It was not the first time this malady had fallen upon her, but there was only one other person in Doomington who knew of it, and though Eli on the former occasion had helped to cure her, this time his assistance would not be asked.

Mrs. Levitsky sprang valiantly to the attack. "Not for thyself I ask that thou shouldst pull thyself together, but for thy child! Look, there was not too much flesh on his bones to begin with. Behold now, how it wastes! How the cheek-bones stand' out! Take no food for thyself if thou desirest, but be for thy child's sake a mother and a Jewess!"

Leah would try to conquer her deadly languor, but once more the opiate tides would draw in on her, lapping about her, straining upwards to her ears. The years would fall withered away from her, like the petals from a flower. Eli and his apostasy would not be remembered, nor her father dead in Kravno, in his corner, under the book-cupboard. The secret tales that Rivkah had told her, the loose woman of Kravno, flooded her nostrils again with a sweet and evil odour. Memories would insinuate themselves into her torpor, of Sergei the moujik, the great muscles of his thighs and the hair along his forearm catching the light . . . his lips, his lips burning. . . .

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All her soul would recoil from the insidious heat of his breath upon her neck. She would claw at the air, her eyes staring. Once the illusion was so fierce, that she rose from the chair and ran from him shrieking. Reuben sprang to her and threw his arms about her. She thrust him away.

"Touch her not!" she cried. "Touch her not! Prostitute that she is!"

So had she called herself once before, returning from Sergei's first kiss in the impious woods, complacently then, now with hideous self-reproach.

The boy had no idea what the word meant, but he knew the way the coarsest women of Green Bower flung it at each other. He seized her by the hands with all his strength and held them.

"How can you!" he stormed. "How can you! How can you!"

The terror fell from her. "Thy pardon!" she moaned, covering her face. "Though I blacken myself, how dare I blacken thee, my little son, my little Jewish son?"

He led her to the sofa and she sat down, still shuddering. It passed away, and the glazed indifference once more returned into her eyes. Half-an-hour passed. She had made no supper. The fire had gone out.

"Mamma," he said, "I am hungry!" She moved listlessly over and started to build up the fire. She crossed over to the sink and filled the kettle, then placed it on the fender and forgot about it. Reuben by this time had forgotten he was hungry. They went supperless to bed.

But Mrs. Levitsky was not to be outdone. She bustled off to Dr. Katz and had a consultation with him. In Jilk Street the terms Doctor and Katz were synony-

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mous. Whenever affairs were sufficiently grave and funds permitted it, or if affairs were still graver and funds did not permit it, it was always Dr. Katz who was called in. And even, when funds permitted it and affairs were not grave at all, Dr. Katz might still be called in, as an insurance or a luxury. For the house where Dr. Katz had paid a visit was assured of consideration at once sympathetic and envious for the rest of the day. It was none other than Dr. Katz who had indirectly induced Leah and Eli to set up the little shop in Jilk Street when Serra Golda had sent over her first packet of roubles. For Reuben, three years old at the time, had been seriously ill and Dr. Katz had warned them that it was all a question of feeding; if they were not careful it would all be brought on again.

Dr. Katz brought back this decision to Leah's mind. He reinforced it with a warning that the boy would probably develop lung-trouble, and if he were carried off, which he might easily be in a year or two, there would be no one to blame but his mother. Mrs. Levitsky further terrified her with the information that wholesale murder was not permitted so lightly in England. No doubt a van would be sent in from some hospital deep in the country to carry the boy away from her sight for ever, to carry all such boys away from the sight of all such mothers.

Of course he would grow up a *goy*. Phylacteries would be forbidden. They would teach him to eat pig. . . .

Leah sprang to her feet, an expression of the utmost horror on her face. Mrs. Levitsky and Dr. Katz were hardly out of the room, before Leah was poking the fire and spreading the Sabbath table-cloth, even though it was only a week-day. Mrs. Levitsky knew she had prevailed.

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She sent in a pot of steaming *lokshen* soup and half a hen to celebrate the victory.

It was after Leah had put Reuben safely to bed that she untied from her neck the talisman which Moisheh, the *Baalshem*, the Master of the Name, had placed there long ago in Kravno. First she took a needle and thread and darned the cloth that contained it where it had worn thin, then she washed it carefully in warm water with vegetable soap, then finally she made an additional blanket for it and replaced it about her neck.

"Till I die," she murmured, "over a hundred years!"

II

There was to be no other life for her henceforth than Reuben. That other was expunged. He had no name, nor effect. She was to devote herself to Reuben, the strengthening of his body and the keeping holy of her mind. His confirmation was not far ahead now, twelve days after the Day of Atonement. Then he would take his place at the *minyón*, a Jew among Jews. Mrs. Levitsky had insisted that she herself would make a party for him in her own parlour. The blessings of the Above One should be upon her, a Jewess truly worthy of the noble Jewesses of old!

And then—there would be time to think then, of his bride, his home, the *kaddish* he would utter for her when she was dead. She was luckier than many women; in one thing she was a queen even compared with Mrs. Levitsky, who had no son to say *kaddish* for her, nobody more than a nephew or perhaps some old man from the synagogue at sixpence a time. Year after year when she

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was dead he would light the candle for her that would burn all night. She was luckier than many women.

Yet she knew that Reuben was not so easy a child to deal with as many children. Subtly, curiously, he was different. She could not define it, and she did not try to, for it was not with her conscious mind she was aware of the difference. Obscurely she was troubled. He needed something more than the other children to keep him in the fold, to keep him by her own side. His heart was not wholly with her. Whither was it wandering? She knew that out of his love for her he never skipped a passage or even a word in his praying. He never omitted to kiss the *mezuzah*. If there was a halfpenny in his pocket on the Friday evening he carefully put it aside till the Sabbath was over. But it was out of love for her that he did these things, not out of love for these things themselves.

As she recovered from her sickness she found herself behaving with regard to him in a manner strange to her and her practice of their religion till that day. Again it was no matter of rational behaviour, it was instinctive, intuitional. It was not the awe of her religion she was presenting to him, though she had never felt it so mightily before. It was the beauty of it she strove to present. It was as if a deep sub-conscious voice cried out in distress within her:

“My child, my child, thine eyes are straying, whither? Relieve me of this anxiety that begins, still faintly, to gnaw at my bones. Thy heart is not utterly, is it, at one with me, thy race, our God? Whither doth it wander then? Is it, can it be, the thing called beauty thou seekest elsewhere? O behold, behold, how bounteously heaped up before thine eyes!”

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So she would endeavour to make the table-cloth for the supper of the Sabbath evenings even whiter than she had made it for her love, her pale, dear scholar, that had so loved and so betrayed her. She would polish the brass trays to look like mirrors, and the candle-sticks gleamed like the flame of their own candle. She knew not why she did these things, but knew she must do them. She told what loveliest legends she could recollect from her childhood, even those that the apostate lips had taught her. She talked of all the festivals in the year, declaring, but not once uttering the frightening alien word, what beauty was in them, in each moment of them. Her mind compassed all the year's festivals, without order, as she remembered them. She told of the plants and flowers wherewith on the Pentecost she would make glad the kitchen. And what cakes she would bake, rich with sweet stuffing, on Purim, the Feast of Esther. And would he be big enough, she wondered, to help with the building of the *succah* upon the Feast of Tabernacles. For that was the feast whereon the wandering of the Israelites through the wilderness was commemorated. And lo, even here, in their dingy backyard in Doomington, the smell of spices would blow. For there would be laths of wood, perhaps even branches of trees, for a roof, carried from the top of the opposite wall to the wall above the kitchen-window. And though last year, and the year before that, and every year since Reuben had been born, there had been a *succah* to eat in, or to sleep in even, if ever the weather permitted it, none had been so beautiful as this year's should be. For there would be straw upon the roof and grass also and the yellow flowers that grew in it, for Reuben must try and gather what green-stuff he might on the edges of the brick-crofts. And the roof must be so constructed

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that the wind came through and it should be the wind from Lebanon. And the stars should be visible and they should be the stars of Zion. And they must hang red apples down from the joints in the roof, suspended from darning-wool, red apples and some bunches of grapes and lemons. Nor had miracles ceased to happen. Perhaps still another packet of roubles might come in from Kravno, not that anybody would dream of asking for it. So that they might buy their own *esrog* and *lulabh*, the citron and the branch of the palm-tree. They would themselves reverse their own immaculate citron, lifted from its bed of down in its odorous far-travelled box, reverse it and shake the branch of palm and say the prayer. They would go together to the synagogue bravely, carrying these things for all Jilk Street and Ealing Street to see. And even should this almost too arrogant dream not be realized, there was always Mrs. Levitsky's—or was it not Mr. Levitsky's?—citron and palm they had so kindly been promised the use of. But always their own *succah*, with the red apples and the grapes and the lemons hanging down.

So she strove with the boy to keep him for her God. And it was these evenings also that Eli strove with him for Christ. And his father and mother he loved passionately, but God and Christ he did not love. Some days he was indifferent to them, sometimes hated them. For they had caused much sorrow in his house. Another god than these claimed him for his own.

It was upon the Feast of Passover, upon the first evening festival, that Leah most fully and proudly urged her cause. It was almost as if her God were on trial and she declared that if none were more terrible, none

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were more beautiful than He. If He showed not His own face, so that none beheld Him as they beheld all other gods, in the things He ordained was beauty, in the language wherewith He was praised, in the eyes of those that fulfilled His ordinances.

More than this. It was almost as if she also were on trial, and her God this time the judge. The complex and protracted ceremonial of the Passover evening festival had hitherto been conducted for her. It had been her father once, and then for thirteen Passovers (or was it fourteen?) her husband. Now her own woman's shoulders unsupported must bear the sacred burden. She must prove she could bear it as honourably as they. Never before, down to its last detail, should it have been so exquisite and so precise.

On the evening that preceded the evening itself she had gone about the house with a taper, searching for casual pieces of leavened food that might have strayed into dark corners. Nothing eluded her. She moved from place to place like a strict priestess. Behind her followed Reuben, a dumb, unimpressed acolyte. But on this evening she was more than a priestess. She was queenly. She had a loose white robe about her, such as her father and Eli and Eli's father had worn. The coils of her false hair to-night added to her a curious, exalted formality. Never before had that mean kitchen looked so royal. The brass trays and candlesticks, the burnished mortar and pestle, looked like the heirlooms of some ancient house. Still she looked girlish and her cheeks were flushed; yet this dignity was about her, this exaltation.

Stage by stage they pursued the elaborate ritual, and

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all its instruments were as fine and choice as she had been able to make them, with long forethought and arduous labour and all the money she could gather together with the most rigid self-denial. First came the chant called *kiddush*, then the washing of the hands, then the bitter herbs were dipped in salt water. Then punctiliously, as all the men of her race had always done and were doing at that moment, she broke the middle round of the three rounds of unleavened bread that lay before her, and hid a portion of it under the pillow against which she was reclining, to take it forth and eat it when the festival was over.

Then came the moment for the asking of those four questions which evoke the whole long tale of the captivity in Egypt and the deliverance of the Children of Israel. The boy had asked them before and had learned them anew this year in *chayder*. He began with the usual prelude:

“Father, I will ask thee the four questions.”

He saw a swift movement of her hand to her heart. Then he saw how she composed herself, but the colour had gone from her cheeks.

“Mother,” he corrected himself, “I will ask thee the four questions. The first question is——”

She sat lovely and regal as before, though a little paler, though she knew her heart was broken, though she knew that for her felicity should never be again, for it lay with him who had gone from her. She knew it was not for her own happiness’ sake that she sat thus at the Pass-over table, before the bitter herbs and the roasted eggs and the mixture of almonds and apples, wine and cinnamon, wherein she must dip the bitter herbs. It was

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for the sake of God's honour and the piety of her boy. Nothing in the world might be wrought for her own sake again.

So they chanted together the story of that night, how their forefathers were slaves together and were delivered, how they were worshippers of idols, of the promise of God to Abraham that his descendants should be delivered out of the hands of them that oppressed them. They sang the exceeding kindness of God through all those dim centuries between the exodus and the building of the Temple. How should his sons not be grateful unto Him? Glory, glory, glory to Him in the highest!

But it was a tale of no meaning to Reuben, though for his mother's sake he sang as lustily as he might. What shadows were these engaged in what windy flickerings? Were not those flickerings of less account than the fire that was reflected upon the glass in the pictures and the glaze of the shoe from Brittany? Had not those flickerings ceased long ago, and that Temple long since crumbled?

When would it all cease, this petulant recapitulation? But he did not show her how tired he was. He sang as lustily as he might. How lovely she looked in her white robe, and her brown eyes shining, and a faint colour, if no more than faint, returning into her cheeks!

Once more now the washing of the hands, then the careful first eating of the unleavened bread, one piece to begin with broken from the round, a second piece broken from the fragment.

What did it all mean, this multiplication of vain ceremonies? Oh, they had told him, his *rebbe* and the rest. But even as they said it, their words lost significance.

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What meaning did they keep still, after one new day had dawned?

Then the bitter herbs, then the eating of bitter herbs and unleavened bread together, then at last the great supper itself!

"Splendid!" he cried to her. "What a mother I've got, the splendidest mother in Doomington!"

She smiled back upon him. Surely there was beauty, there was incomparable flavour, in these *halkies* alone, these little dumplings made from unleavened bread ground small! Was there a prince in any principality who had such *schmalz* placed upon his table, so rich a fat of fowls? And when were fowl's wings roasted more delicately and potatoes so cunningly baked? And he endeavoured to steal from under the pillow, as he knew she would like him to, the piece of unleavened bread she had hidden there, the *afkuman*. And she almost allowed him to, but prevented him in time. "For who knows," she said, "what thou wouldst have made me promise to give thee, hadst thou stolen it, before thou hadst given it me again! Perhaps a piano, perhaps the moon, yes?"

He thought swiftly of the one thing he would have asked for, had his soul dared to speak.

"Mamma, well thou knowest thou mayst not break thy word. Thou hast promised to give me what I desire, no? Here then is the *afkuman*. Thou, for thy part, shalt restore my father to me. And thou, O my sweet mother, dost thou not desire him even as I, more than all other things in the world? Say it, mother, say it! Dost thou not desire him more even than God?"

But he knew she would not say it.

And the grace after meals followed. Then followed

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more chanting and more chanting and more chanting. They did not eat so well every night in the year. Could it not be forgiven him that he was a little, just a little, sleepy? They had already drunken three glasses of wine. There was still a fourth to drink. There was no end to this chanting. How sleepy he was, how desperately sleepy. What did it all matter? To whom?

For her sake he tried to keep his eyes open and go on with the interminable chanting. She knew the effort he was making. She tried to inspirit him with the colour and fervency of the prayers. But he was asleep at last now and she had not the heart to awaken him.

She realized, not with her mind but in her heart's blood, that all this ceremonial she had so lovingly rendered for him, to show him what beauty lay in it, it was all nothing to him, a weariness. He took no delight in the glass of wine by the edge of the table, poured out for Elijah. The flavour of *charoseth*, this immemorial compound of apples and almonds, wine and cinnamon, lay upon his tongue like stale crumbs of bread. He had asked with his lips what all these things meant, the bitter herbs, the salt water, the small bone with a little meat on it, all these hallowed and timeless things. But he had not indeed desired to know. The colour and fervency went from her voice. In a dry monotone she wound her way from passage to passage till the service was ended.

Alone she drank the fourth glass of wine, though she felt it was wrong to allow it. What could she do else? Alone she prayed that the Temple might be rebuilt and Israel restored to Zion.

She said to herself: "Poor child, is it not my own fault? Have I not myself let him go hungry? He has

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not recovered yet. He is weak and sleep came to him."

But she knew that was not the truth. What cared he for the rebuilding of the Temple and the return to Zion?

"Wait till next year!" she cried in anguish. "For he will have had his *bar-mitzvah* then. He will know himself a Jew among Jews. Take not him also!" she implored. "Not my child! Take not my child also from me!"

She touched him lightly on the eyes. "To bed!" she whispered.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

SHE had not bothered to light the gas this evening, for Reuben would be away for some hours yet. The boys of his class had been taken to a lantern lecture somewhere. It was chilly, for the year had turned. The autumnal New Year of the Jewish Calendar was not many weeks ahead. She shivered, but she did not move from her chair on the left side of the fire-guard. There was a bucket of coke beside her, but she did not rise to replenish the fire. The flame had gone. Only embers were left now. She was lonely.

She heard a slight noise at the door-handle. The door opened. She did not turn her head. Her eyes were fixed upon the dying embers. She heard him slowly come into the kitchen like a blind man. But he found his way to his old place at the end of the sofa, where he could easily reach up into the cupboard for his books and spread them before him on the table.

"So thou art come?" she said.

"I am here!"

"Didst thou know how lonely I was this night?"

"This night and all the nights!"

"This night and all the nights!" she echoed.

"Even as I!"

"How shouldst thou also not be lonely, for we loved each other greatly!"

"Even as now!"

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"Thou sayest right. Even as now! Yea, but there was happiness between us once!"

"In the old days. Dost thou remember the old days?"

"Didst thou know how, when I was a tiny girl in Kravno, they called me the *parachod*, the steamer, because at morning and evening I cried long and loud? For the *parachod* went down the river in the morning to Terkass and came back in the evening, and each time it cried!"

"I knew of thee before thou wert born, and after thou art dead I shall know!"

"Say, didst thou love me also when we were children? For thou wert with the holy books all day and I was in the shop or walking in the fields with Henkah and the other maidens. Didst thou love me then?"

"How shall I not have loved you, night and day, dawn and sunset, each moment of each hour? How should I not love you so?"

"I dare not turn my head towards thee!"

"Do not turn thy head!"

"A sweet maiden was Dinélé. I had hoped that I too should have had a daughter like her."

"It was otherwise decreed. Thou hast not heard how Henkah's marriage fared?"

"Two girls and a boy, no harm befall them!"

"Thy mother still sends the *halva* from Turkey? It reaches thee safe?"

"A blessing upon her!"

"When I was but six years old I said by heart a chapter from the Shulchan Aruch, and my mother, peace be upon her, went to thy mother's to buy me *halva* for four *kopecks*. I was sick."

"Thou shouldst have fed on nothing but *chomaikes*

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for three days thereafter. For being fish it lies light on the stomach, and being dried there is no oil to bring the gall forth. Had I then been thy wife thou shouldst have eaten naught else."

"But one small dish of broad beans?"

"That may have been. Yet a child's handful only. What a rascal thou hast always been for broad beans. I remember how thy mother, peace be upon her, told me of it when they knew we were to be wed. It is getting colder in this room."

"Do not move. Let it be. Let us warm our hands at the spent fires."

"Yea, when we wandered in the meadows——"

"Dost thou remember that scarlet flower among the stubble which was like a princess's slipper. Thy foot, the foot even of thee, was larger."

"Sometimes we thought that the cut maize was bands of moujiks. How we fled into the shelter of the pine-woods, trembling and laughing."

"Then we grew sober again and told tales. How apt a pupil thou wert!"

"At the knees of such a master!"

"It might be high noon when we entered——"

"And it seemed twilight at once."

"Sometimes a pigeon flapped his wings high overhead."

"And all his brothers crooned."

"And a rabbit darted out suddenly."

"And thou saidst it was a wolf. I was afraid."

"Our feet were hushed upon the pine-needles. But there was always a noise among the tops of the trees."

"Then indeed twilight came."

"Yea, with the setting of the sun, and the gold light

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slanted upon the trunks and found its way between them and wandered in and out."

"And we fled, before night came, and the cold and the wind."

"But the cold came and the wind."

"They are about us now."

"Do not turn thy head."

"In the embers now there is neither heat nor light."

"Not any in the world."

"Is it thou that risest and goest away? Wilt thou not take down the Mishna and read from it? It waits for thee still in the cupboard over thy head. The fire shall be stirred up again."

"I burn with other fires."

"They have consumed thee and me."

"They have consumed us utterly."

"Is it thy fingers at the handle of the door? What? Why dost thou not answer me? Is it thou that walkest away from me, I that loved thee, thou that has loved me so? Why was I born or he? It is cold, I am very cold."

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

I

THE hostility which Eli's efforts to bring the Jews of Doomington over to Christ had always evoked, began to slacken. For a time he was puzzled by it. He tried to convince himself there was a hope at last that the seed he had scattered in this stubborn soil was germinating. Who knew? First the blade, then the ear; after that even the full corn in the ear?

He knew he was deceiving himself. He felt it in the waning of his eloquence, for this complacency disarmed him. He found it more injurious than all their howling. He began to realize that it was the clash of his faith against their fury that had brought forth lightning.

The attendances began to dwindle. A little admiration for his courage persisted, and when they came they looked on him curiously, nothing more. He had grown stale, they left him crying at the street-corners. The fathers and mothers did not even trouble to keep the small children away. These too grew weary of him. Only a mad old Irish woman followed him about from corner to corner. She thought he was proclaiming the injuries of her country and clapped her skinny hands. She wept, or, grinning, showed her three yellow teeth.

"I am charged of Christ," he said to himself, "and do not fulfil his behests. Am I not as the vessel that was

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marred of the potter? How shall I be made again another vessel, as it seems good to thee, Christ, to make it? How shall it be done," he said, "for they hearken not to me? Once more are they falling upon that sleep wherein they have slept two thousand years. How must they be awakened? With a loud trumpet and terrible, louder than the ram's horn which blows these days upon their festivals. Wilt Thou grant even to me, O Lord, to be the trumpet of their awakening?"

II

This was the day of days, the Day of Atonement. Even that day whereon the God of Israel had promised to forgive His children, to cleanse them, that they might be clean from all their sins before the Lord. But after what contrition, what tears, what beating of breasts! After what sudden intolerable silences that fell none knew how upon every man and woman and child gathered in the synagogue, as if each for that tremendous moment were filled with the immediate presence of God! Then once more the storm of weeping broke out like a stream that has been checked, and, bursting its barrier, is more tumultuous than before.

Now was the morning service in that small synagogue in Begley Hill called the *Ukrainer Chevrah*. No drop of water had moistened any parched mouth since the evening of the previous day, nor chafed any hot brow, and should not till the long day was ended and the ram's horn blown. It was at this hour, if they had time to attend to them, that hunger and thirst were felt most keenly. For as the day broadened the body would be surfeited of stifled airs and the soul limp in the expenditure of its

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passion. And in the afternoon all but the most pious would cluster about the doorway of the synagogue or wander desultorily away for some minutes with the crying in their ears. They would return and climb the dark stairways again, a little dazed, and take the places near the Ark, or by the pulpit, or against the door, according to their degrees. And the day's praying would not be one moment remitted, and the tears would still flow, and all day there would be a clapping together of hands and a beating of breasts.

But the most pious did not move. They did not even sit down all that dolorous day. As, for instance, this small woman with brown eyes, withdrawn from the rest, huddled against the partition, which shut off the women's section from the main synagogue. That woman was Leah—pity her, and shed a tear for her!—the wife of the nameless, the abominable one. She had one small son, Reuben by name. There he is in the synagogue, hidden away behind the pulpit in one of the cheaper seats, and it has been given him for almost nothing, for the officers of the synagogue know his shame and his mother's, and are sorry for them.

Even those that wander farthest away from the fold are gathered within it to-day, and a terror is at their hearts. Even those who have taken gentile women to wife and have been ashamed to bring their sons within the Covenant of Abraham, even those are here.

One only, one only, of all those that have wandered, is not returned to-day.

Once and again as the service proceeds, a man must go forth to the Holy Ark and draw the curtain aside and open wide the doors. There lie the Scrolls of the Law. Lo, in that mothy cupboard all the thunders and light-

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nings that were upon Sinai are gathered together, and the smoke thereof that ascended as the smoke of a furnace.

The thunder is in their ears, the lightnings dazzle their eyes, the smell of the smoke is within their nostrils.

On this day is their race mighty, and in their mightiness are they abased. Upon this day must Atonement be made, even as of old. And he that stood in the pulpit unfolded the scroll and read from it, his voice being hoarse with exultation and choked with tears.

"And ye shall have on the tenth day of this seventh month an holy convocation: and ye shall afflict your souls: ye shall not do any work therein.

"But ye shall offer a burnt offering unto the Lord for a sweet savour; one young bullock, one ram, and seven lambs of the first year; they shall be unto you without blemish.

"And their meat offering shall be of flour mingled with oil, three-tenth deals to a bullock, and two-tenth deals to one ram.

"A several tenth deal for one lamb, throughout the seven lambs.

"One kid of the goats. . . ."

What was this noise of feet that came so rudely from the stairs beyond? He continued:

"... for a sin offering; besides the sin offering of Atonement. . . ."

What was this? What was this outcry? Who had thus burst in upon the reading of the most holy book, even upon this day, the Day of Atonement?

He had returned, the one wanderer, who had not been counted among the fold this day.

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He thrust his way between the crowded seats. They recoiled from him more frightfully than if it were death from the plague to be touched by him. It was Eli the apostate. He it was who stood before the Holy Ark, facing his brethren gathered together to do penance on the Day of Atonement.

His eyes were rimmed as with flame. His hair stuck wildly about his head. His clothes were coated with mud and thick with thorns.

"Brothers!" he cried, "Brothers!" And the voice was greater than his own. "Believe it not! The day is over whereon the kid of the goats must be offered! And there is no meaning now in the continual burnt offering, and the meat offering and the drink offerings!

"Another Atonement was made for us, my brethren in Zion, even our own brother, Christ! Listen, I command you, for my hours are numbered! Listen, for I speak in the authority of the bread of his body that he broke for us, and the blood that was poured out for wine! Even by the warrant of this Cross I speak!"

And he drew a crucifix forth from his bosom and held it before their eyes as he stood there before the Ark, the Holy of Holies, upon this august, terrific day, the Day of Atonement.

A sound of horror was heard from amongst them. It was not as if their throats and tongues had conspired to make it. The sound came from the violated arcana of their beings. It was a sound desolate and fearful, more than the wind among reeds by a pestilent river, more than a voice among ghosts in a field of battle.

"Think ye I do not know what sacrilege ye hold it that upon this day I bring your Christ into your midst? How long upon this day have ye spurned him, the sole

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Atonement? Upon what other day should he be brought to you, that ye may hearken?

"Slay me, slay me! Let my bones be cast to the wilderness! But I will prevail in the blood of Christ! For the Lord is with me as a mighty terrible one: therefore my persecutors shall tremble, and they shall not prevail!

"I come not upon this day to ask your graces. I come armed with more desperate thunder than rocked upon Sinai. For the veil of the Temple is rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth doth quake and the rocks are rent. But ye must hear!"

They heard no word. Their glassy eyes were fixed upon that sign wherein their own bodies had been broken, age without end, and their blood poured for wine. The dogs drank it and the vessels wherefrom they drank were the gutters of the street.

They heard no word. But the stilled blood was unloosened. The blood pulsed in their brains like the hammers of doom. Their fingers twitched like the claws of beasts. The air was red as with reflected fires and spilt blood steaming. Their heads drew forward from their breasts. Their bodies strained towards the Ark that had been violated as never before in the annals of their race, strained towards the apostate, inspired and hideous, towards his throat, his eyes.

Then a voice broke out resonant as the voice of God's archangel.

"Cease!" it cried, a voice sliding down cloud levels from the mid point of heaven.

The man ceased, Christ's name suspended upon his lips. The others turned their heads. It was Leah, the wife of the apostate. Rapt and towering she was—frail, mortal woman.

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"Cease!" she cried. "Have ye forgotten yourselves? Have ye forgotten what day is this? Lo, is not this the most sacred of days, the Day of Atonement? Would ye touch the things wherewith ye might make fire or cook yourselves a meal? Would ye touch a beast of the field that was not clean? How then shall ye lay your fingers upon this uttermost impiety? How then shall not your fingers be fouled on this most sacred of days? Get ye back, I say, back to your places! Let him speak till his obscene tongue fall from its roots! Stuff your ears with your hands, men and women and children of this synagogue! Even so I bid you, at God's bidding! God shall appoint the avenger, be not ye dismayed!"

They sank back into their places, man and woman and child. She returned to her place against the wooden partition. He took up once more his broken argument, Christ and the love of Christ, Christ and his terror.

Man and woman and child sat hunched over their knees, their ears stuffed with their hands. They heard no word.

"Millennial embodiment of Israel!" he cried. "Concrete stubbornness!" They did not move. Their faces were grey as tombs.

The words on his lips faltered. His neck snapped. His body crumbled. He passed out amongst them, slinking like a thrashed beast.

They had defeated him. They had defeated Christ.

III

Why was she so withdrawn from him all that day? Why did she stand so pale, so still, against the partition and when he took her hand, why did she not look

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down towards him and hope her boy was fasting bravely?

See how the women held themselves apart from her as from one upon whom God's hand lay, making her terrible.

Reuben resumed his seat again under the pulpit. How alone in all this tumultuous world he seemed. But the tumult was not so desperate as before, for a horror lay upon the synagogue and some were hoarse and others dumb.

How alone in all the world. For these were only rocking ghosts. And far beyond the circuit of their wanderings, along the furthest opposed borders of the ghostly territories, his father and mother were going away from him, from each other, singly, into the darkness.

And the ram's horn was blown, and the day was ended.

She prepared food and drink and bade him break his fast.

"Mother, mother, why art thou not also eating?"

"There is a duty to perform, child, child, before I eat again."

"Yom Kippur is over, mother. It is time to eat. There are no more duties to perform. As thou lovest me, mother. . . ."

"Child, child!" she said.

Reuben woke. He knew she was not by his side. He pushed back his leg cautiously. She was not there.

He knew, even while he still slept, she was not there. How could he have lain so long sleeping?

He thrust the feather-bed aside. It fell away from him heavier than lead. He rose and dressed quickly.

The stairs creaked. The front door moaned on its

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hinges. He lifted his feet and ran swiftly, soundlessly, along Jilk Street and into Ealing Street and so into Begley Hill Road. It was late. Not many of the street-lamps were still burning. There was no light in any window anywhere. All the world was tired with the rigours of the Day of Atonement. There was not even a policeman prowling about on his beat. He did not slacken his speed. He was on the confines of Longton now.

He knew where she had gone, he knew.

This was the corner of Pratt Street. He swung round towards the house where his father lived. Then he stopped. He heard his heart beating loudly and loneliness in the night. There was no sound else.

He tapped faintly and fearfully at the window as he had tapped many times before, but more faintly, more fearfully. He heard no sound. He waited. His heart rocked like flotsam on miserable seas. He tapped again.

He heard the door in the room beyond opening. Then steps followed, making for the door in the street. It was open. His mother stood there.

"Mother!" he said.

She descended the two steps between them. "So thou hast come!" she said. She took his hand.

They walked out of Pratt Street into the Longton Road. She said no word. Her hand was cold. She was aloof from him, separate. There was a pride in her bearing and an exaltation. Though their hands were joined together, not if the whole world's width were between them could they have been more sundered.

"Mother!"

"Once more," she said, but it did not seem in reply to him, or to him at all. "Once more I saw the face. It bade me. I obeyed."

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"Mother!" he whimpered.

She bent down to him. "Hush-a-bye, baby!" she said. "Hush-a-bye, baby!"

They turned away from Begley Hill Road which led them along to Ealing Street and their own house. They turned down the Blenheim Road where the dark clay-crofts weltered on either side.

"Mother, where are you going?"

"A baby shall soon know!" she said.

There was silence as they descended. The chill of death was in the hand that held his hand. They turned round into Chester Street. One light burned there, beyond a waste of clayey waters. It was the light in the police station.

They stood outside its threshold. She allowed his hand to fall from hers.

"A moment!" she said. "Stand thou here!" she said. She placed her fingers on his eyes, and was gone.

She climbed the steps and walked along the bright passage.

She had more than the pride of a priestess or a queen. An avenging angel rather.

A policeman had come out from a side room. She went up and said ten words to him. He stiffened. He stretched out his fingers before her face. Another policeman had appeared. The first whispered to the new-comer and pointed with his thumb towards the threshold and the night. The second policeman nodded. He advanced along the passage and for a moment his bulk was outlined massively against the light behind him. Then he descended and slipped his hand gently into the boy's hand. He tried to lead him away.

"My mother!" the boy shrieked suddenly. "I want my

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mother! Where has my mother gone? Bring her back to me!"

She was not brought back to him. He saw again neither her nor his father, the carpenter of Doomington that had gone the way of his kinsman, the carpenter of Galilee.

EPILOGUE IN SICILY

EPILOGUE IN SICILY

66 *“SHE was not brought back to me. I saw again neither her nor my father, the carpenter of Doomington that had gone the way of his kinsman, the carpenter of Galilee.”*

So ended the tale I heard from the lips of the goat-herd of Sicily, Reuben, the son of Eli. I do not know him by any other name, and it is enough, for this is the way in which men of my race speak of each other.

All that day, which was the Day of Atonement, I had sat facing him under the vine that was supported by chestnut poles over his threshold. Now and again, but not often, I was aware of his children, as shapes, voices, flame-like and water-like presences. More often I was aware of his wife, even when she was not visible. As the day advanced, there were moments when her smouldering hostility towards me broke into a red flare of anger, though swiftly as she looked upon his eyes and his lips again, I was forgotten. But the man himself was not conscious of her, nor of his children, nor indeed of me, his audience. His sole concern was with the ghosts of the dead years whom he thus evoked once that he might lay them beyond any chance of accidental or deliberate avocation for ever and for ever.

Sunset was among the groves of olive and each leaf was burnished with bronze fires. Sunset lay upon the African Sea, and it was a road paved with bronze plates.

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Twilight lingered briefly. Night was upon us as he uttered the last words of his tale. And even at that moment I became aware of a shuffling of feet, an expectancy, of old women coughing in the draughty corners of the synagogue, of my Aunt Deborah's black bangles tinkling, of the boys crowding together as the ram's horn was brought forward for the blowing. Here was the liberation, all sins atoned for, the Day of Atonement ended. Three times declare ye the praise of His Kingdom; that He alone is the Almighty declare ye not fewer times than seven!

Loud and shrill across land and sea, even in this place of olive and almond trees and the ruins of the Greek temples, I heard the ram's horn blown.

"Listen, Jew!" I cried. "Do you not hear it? The blast upon the ram's horn! The Day of Atonement is ended!"

He sprang to his feet. He stretched out his arms and threw back his head like a Greek prince. He laughed.

"Never, never!" he cried, exulting, as one that shakes from his shoulders the burden of unnumbered centuries. "Never shall I hear the blast of the ram's horn! Never have I heard it! Hark! There in the olive-groves! Nuzza, come, woman! Ciccio! Children! Do you not hear the pipe of Pan in the groves? Come with me, children! Come, Nuzza! Follow! The pipe of Pan in the groves!"

Autumn, 1924.

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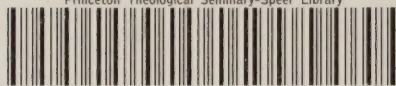
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